

RMR 5 Workshop--A Kabbalistic Perspective on the Integration of the Conflict Practitioner

Based on my study with Jason Shulman, A Society of Souls www.kabbalah.org.

1. Why study the Kabbalistic Universes?

Wherever we are seated, the world is defined by the lens through which we are seeing reality. As we work with people coming from different perspectives, it is important to have a framework to assess the parties to the conflict and ourselves as important players. How we see ourselves and how we stand in relationship to inner and outer conflict changes from universe to universe. This journey changes everything, because the world we see is really the world that we are at any particular time. So the journey describes how we change, and changing, can see and be in the world differently. A basic understanding and experience of our relationship to reality in each realm helps us enter a new paradigm, which deepens our relationship with the world around us and within us.

According to Jason, the Kabbalistic view of enlightenment is not an elevated state achieved through arduous self denial or a mind blowing peak experience. Enlightenment is not even a state of being but rather an ongoing inquiry into the nature of life. That means our relationship to reality needs to be tended to every moment, like a garden, or a child or our own lives and bodies. We tend this garden by inquiring into the nature of the self, the mind, and life. If you approach every moment in your life including your work in conflict through a state of inquiry into seeing and being in reality with eyes opened, then your capacity to be integrated and awake is heightened, and more freedom, choice and joy naturally arise.

At end of the day, how we engage in conflict, (our own and other peoples") and our spiritual practice can become the same. It is one approach to life, which is to be awake to the unfolding moment. When we understand who is showing up, we are free to be with clients in any universe and to use the tools of conflict engagement along the entire spectrum as appropriate to the situation. We are not bound to see our clients and ourselves only one way. We then become more capable of creating a container where parties to conflict can choose to employ a larger view of themselves or not. We have this freedom because we understand the mechanism of conflict, which is life becoming itself through each living thing unfolding in time. Through practice of awareness into the "who" that sees, we become less dependent on a particular kind of tool or frame or even achieving a particular outcome.

Intro to the 4 Universes.

Assiyah- Doing, Making and Action--

Taken together, the four Kabbalistic universes present a topographical map of reality--a vision of increasing levels of integration. Each successive universe includes and

contains the others. Since the ego and reality in Assiyah are the densest, here we are closest to the human realm and to our everyday world. Assiyah is unaware that there is another way to view reality, that the other universes exist. Physical, mechanical and biological processes operate here. From an Assiyah only perspective, there is a complete subject/object split. Each thing is an object and I am the subject of the world. Cause and Effect are separated by space and time. Time is linear.

Here the light of the Infinite (God's consciousness) is most concealed and difficult to access. The disconnection from God (which is another term for evil) is acted out most glaringly. We see ourselves as separate from the world. We don't question the existence or rightness of our self and our point of view. Rather, we are concerned with how this self makes its way in the world, who supports our existence and desires and who threatens us by standing in the way. When bad stuff happens to us it seems unfair, mysterious and a threat to our well-being.

The ego here is non-reflective. What goes against my current understanding of the world and sense of security is a threat and needs to be managed and controlled. Power rules. People coming for mediation in an Assiyah only perspective view success in terms of maximizing gain (including material or physical security) and minimizing loss. Totems convey power. These include money, prestige, status, etc. Thus the house, beautiful wife, successful husband, important job are identities and things to fight for. The ego identifies itself as a solid thing that needs these objects to be safe, to help sustain its identity.

Clients coming exclusively from this place are unaware of emotions driving or affecting their view, of past patterns and that other's may have a different but perfectly valid perspective. We are a certain way and so is everything else. Self and other are disparate, particularly when 'other' is threatening one's sense of self and reality. Our sense of safety is tied up with a physical belonging to tribe, family, community, nation. Identity is based on collective understandings, defined by structures that manifest physically: rules, legal structures, location, looks, race, etc. The mediation process is used to minimize the threat to the ego self. Resources are seen as limited.

Mediation in this universe is results driven. What you see is what you get. We stay focused on the surface, on what people say they want, on the facts, laws, or rules of business, family or other governing structure. Power and rights and position based bargaining and evaluative mediation takes place in this universe. Conflict negotiation from this perspective may range from power plays, -attitudes like "might makes right" or "strong man wins"--to compromises based on slicing up a limited pie that each party must vie for. Often divorcing parents with this point of view will fight over numbers of days each spends with the kids without any view to how the children's needs are affected or what quality of time each has available to offer the children--it simply becomes a match for more--money, time, power and position. Spend some time in almost any courtroom and you will get a good dose of conflict with Assiyah only consciousness: Parties who do not take responsibility for their actions, blaming anything or anyone else--their spouse, employer, society for their circumstances;

lawyers who are often perpetuating conflict to further their own interests (money, fame, trial experience, etc.); judges who feel themselves to be powerless functionaries of a dysfunctional, but entrenched system.

Just as in the physical realm everything is separate and locatable, in this universe differences are highlighted. Differences create conflict. Agreements focus on distribution of assets and on behavior--what will be done or not done in the future. The mediator and the parties do not value the process or the relationships as having an independent value. Parties may be kept in separate rooms as the mediator goes back and forth, trading offers and using his power to bring the parties to a result. Settlement, though less than satisfactory, may be less painful than the uncertainty of going to court. The parties case is set against some objective and external criteria such as what might happen if the case were litigated. In an Assiyah only mediation, the conflict professional has no interior and neither do the parties she serves. We are focused on the concrete and external representation of reality. The mediator uses this criteria as well as his personal power based on position or experience to help craft a settlement where no one is quite happy but the job gets done.

Mediators in an Assiyah only universe work to acquire skills and tools that can be applied towards a desired outcome. We strive to acquire more experience, prestige and skills to achieve a sense of mastery and control. (This skill set, by the way, is very important, useful and necessary and cannot be dispensed with.) We have a firm idea of what happens in the cases before us, based on issues framed by distribution of power or material goods. We look to what was done and said. We have a fixed idea what the range of probable outcomes should be, based on our experience applied to these facts, the positions of the parties and societal or legal ideas of right and wrong. We see ourselves as third party professionals controlling a process from outside the fray so we can apply a "neutral" or objective perspective. Success and failure are measured by percentage of cases settled and the amount of money one can charge. We have little tolerance for emotions, self-reflection or veering away from the issues that have been defined.

(Note: When fully integrated with the other Universes, Assiya is the realm of manifestation and completion where the interaction between the spiritual and physical dimension bring culmination of all universes into fulfillment.)

b. **Yetzirah-Formation** (to form; something from something) **15 minutes**

Yetzirah is more integrated than Assiyah, and therefore it is transparent to or contains Assiyah within it. The work of Yetzirah is of vital importance in the process of knowing and understanding one's history and motivations--why we are the way we are. It is a necessary layer in the fabric of consciousness and a necessary step in personal development. Spiritual work that bypasses this universe is not grounded and creates splits in consciousness, and therefore dualistic way of seeing and being in the world.

Yetzirah is the universe of emotions and interiority through which a new relationship with ourselves and our world arises. We begin to see that we are as much responsible for

making the world as the world is making us. This brings a new level of freedom and responsibility. We begin to look to our inner life and discover the unseen interior from which our actions flow. We begin to understand that we act or react according to impulses rooted in our history. We do inner work to understand how our interior mood and perceptions are in part responsible for how we feel and what we see. We look at patterns and wounds from our personal history to understand how we got into our current difficulties so we can solve them.

Clients coming in with this universe's perspective have more of a sense of their own emotional life, and how past patterns and personal perspectives have in some way played a part of creating the situation that brings them into mediation. They may be more willing to have a softer version of reality or facts. They have the capacity to understand that the person on the other side of the negotiation may have an honest difference. Reality is less fixed here and there is more of a willingness of the participants to see one's part and one's history and psychological makeup as being an important ingredient in both the frame of the problem and the potential solutions. Right and wrong are not quite so inalterable. Feelings count and sometimes count more than anything.

Because in this realm importance is placed on personal relationships, mediators with a Yettzeratic awareness encourage parties to think about and discuss what is important to them beyond the distribution of power, money, decision making, etc. We would focus also on the feelings of the disputants, the history of the conflict and the process of engagement. From this perspective, process may be as important as outcome. Exploring emotions and Interest based bargaining would be beneficial here because each party has the capacity to see and recognize that the other may have valid interests different from his own. This makes a genuine dialogue possible. Parties can arrive at a broader definition of values and interests, one that includes intangible considerations like communication, validation, recognition of the other's importance and recognition of the value of process. Mediator skills would include nonviolent communication, reflective and empathic listening and the transformative approach's focus on recognition and empowerment. The mediator can help the parties define goals in terms that include communication, process, feelings, internal health and well-being.

Mediators with this lens are more aware of what they feeling and how their own participation and point of view are affecting the process. They understand that they cannot be truly be objective and neutral in any situation and that the way that they see the parties and define the issue has an affect on the parties and the process. They also see the importance of doing their own personal and psychological work (as well as the Assiyatic work of skills building--remember, each successive universe includes all the other). This would include understanding aversions and preferences. Conflict practitioners can work with practices like meditation and body awareness. They would look for techniques to stay more open to the unseen processes during the mediation such as taking a breath, moving into the pain, maintaining a feeling connection to the parties and developing a greater awareness of their bodies' reactions, blind spots and triggers.

If what the parties really care about is process, relationship and deeper understanding of the dynamics beneath the conflict, and a mediator is limited to an Assiyatic view, a material and power only perspective, what is truly important to the parties will not be addressed in the mediation process. In this case, any agreement reached based solely on material and behavioral criteria will not truly satisfy or resolve the parties' deeper concerns. Conflict professionals with Yettzeratic capacities may use many of the same tools and techniques as the Assiyah only mediator, but they would have a larger view of the purpose for which they are using them. They could broaden the criteria to evaluate a successful mediation to include how the parties felt, whether a deeper understanding or greater insight was achieved regardless of whether the case actually settled.

C. BriaH- Power of creation. Something from Nothing.

BriaH is the Universe of Creation that can hold both the Oneness of Unity and the truth of our individual existence. In its integrated form, BriaH is a state of mind that allows life to unfold with an acceptance of its mystery. From this perspective, we can see the limitations of Assiyah and Yetzirah as a kind of fiction--because in those places we see a part of reality and yet we take it as the Whole. From the perspective of the small self, everything is a threat. From Assiyah, we feel a threat to our physical safety. Losing what is familiar to us, marital or job status, feels like an immediate threat to our lives. From Yetzirah, we experience a threat to our emotional well being, our psyche. If we are not seen and understood. From BriaH, there is no problem with holding that the ego is separate, that it has to struggle and strive for physical and emotional safety, and at the same time with knowing that we are a part of everything else. BriaH has no problem with duality, with paradox, with seeing all things, including the split parts and separate ego as a part of a deeper "I Am", a dualistic expression of a unified thing. We come to see that we touch the Infinite not by becoming infinite but by embracing our limitations.

Mediation from this perspective creates the container where cognitive shifts happen, where the parties can soften the way they see themselves, their point of view and the other person. This does not happen by the mediator having an agenda of transformation, which may not be the parties' agenda at all. It happens in the process of allowing participants to be with what is in such a way that includes both the difficulty of being human and the potential for largess in the situation.

When we work in conflict from BriaH, we understand that our work is not personal only, that the dispute is part of a bigger and impersonal unified field. This does not mean being dispassionate. Rather, from BriaH we cultivate a deeper kind of compassion--one that allows us to hold the pain of the people we are working with and their challenging situations in a bigger context--with softer eyes and bigger hearts. This frees us to trust our instinct, to stay engaged (Bernie Mayer's work), and to "mediate dangerously." (Ken Cloke's work). We can be with our clients and their emotions with this direct intimacy because we recognize the territory--we have done our own work. We do not see these intractable positions, limited views and unpleasant emotions as obstacles. We have the fortitude to explore these difficulties, including all that is arising within us, as potential

gateways into some territory, the exploration of which may allow for a different kind of engagement with the participants and the process.

Remember, each successive universe contains the others. So we include our mission to help the parties resolve their conflict or engage it in a more healthy way. We include our very important Assiyatic experience and skill set, our view of the facts and circumstances and the underlying familial, legal or political structures. We include ours and the parties' expectations. We also have a larger view that allows us to hold opposites and to be in paradox. We see ourselves as a part of the process and not separate from it. We sense that the divine lives not just in the light places but in the challenges and the difficulties as well. We acknowledge the parties' capacity to participate in the unfolding of their own process, to create their own outcome and also to limit the results based on where they are and what they need. We see the flow of time as more fluid and the conflict as a part of a richer stream of events and not as an isolated picture frame. Therefore we recognize that the benefits that arise from the process may not be immediate. We can also see that it is not all ours to solve. We allow for the possibility that there are other forces at work that we do not control.

Although the players may be in an Assiyah or Yetziratic consciousness, if we honor this and hold the conflict from a Briatic point of view, we will have more freedom to be with the parties in their process as it unfolds. We magnify our capacity to hold the container where shifts can happen, where participants can get bigger than their immediate circumstances. We thus fortify our intention and will to meet our clients where they are and to approach the difficulty and conflict we find ourselves in with more courage and greater kindness.

d. Atzilut (A state so elevated that we rarely work with it in the material plane. This and Adam Kadmon, the fifth Universe are so ephemeral and filled with the light of the Divine that they are nick-named "Nothingness")

This universe is absorbed in the Divine. It is so light, so integrated and "un-shattered" that it provides little barrier to God's light so as to be nicknamed "Nothingness". From the linear or hierarchical point of view, Atzilut is so unified with heaven, so transparent to God's Light, that it is virtually unreachable. From a more holographic point of view, some aspects of this conscious can become manifest as we open and surrender to grace. This can happen when a person understands the actions of Assiyah, the feelings and motivations of Yetzirah and the non-duality of Briah and chooses to return to daily life with other people, with work, with this imperfect world, complete with all its pain and with all of its joy.