

## A Triad “3Chair” Model of Consciousness & Conversation

In this approach of empathy and mindfulness in conversation, the mindfulness aspect is embedded in a particular understanding of consciousness and experience of reality that is represented in a triad “3-chair” model. This model comes out of the Mediate Your Life body of work. In the 3Chair Model, two opposing chairs represent the “disputants” who are in conflict, and the third chair represents the mediator. The disputants can be two people with whom we are mediating, or they can be our self and another person with whom we are in conflict, or they can be different parts of our self in conflict.

On a deeper level of this model, the three chairs represent self, other, and awareness, and the triad as a whole represents the singularity of consciousness. In terms of communication and conversation, the two chairs of self and other represent speaking and listening in the world of duality that is our common experience of reality, the world of matter, form and limitation, the reality of subject and object, past and future, linear time, cause and effect, the realm of Newtonian physics. It is also the world of polarity — up and down, hot and cold, good and bad, right and wrong. From the heartbreaking extremes of suffering and violence to the astonishing beauty and joy that we humans are capable of experiencing, this is the realm of mind and body.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> chair of awareness represents access to a “nondual” reality. Awareness is our subjective experience of non-thinking, non-conceptual knowing. Sense perceptions (sights, sounds, smells, touch, taste), thoughts, feelings, and actions appear and disappear in awareness, but awareness itself is different from all these. Everything else is a temporary form that comes and goes. Awareness, however, does not come and go. It is formless space and energy. It is a knowing, vibrant field in which everything happens. Even our sense of self, upon close examination, is a set of changing thought-feeling-action patterns that we can observe and feel as they come and go in our awareness.

*The 3Chair Model is a triad structure to support speaking and listening in conversation with awareness and consciousness.*

Consciousness is represented by the wholeness of the three chairs. It is awareness when it is experienced as selfless and unified, when there is no subject or object, no self or other, no separateness or no conflict; and the contents of awareness are different forms of one consciousness that creates and temporarily becomes them. From this perspective, all things are part of a larger wholeness, totality, and source. This is the realm of “nonduality,” the formless, unmanifest potential that the mystics of millennia and physicists of quantum reality describe. In this realm it seems there is access to unlimited, infinite possibilities for creativity, well-being, and unconditional love.

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**3Chairs Practice:** A way to practice is to simply be aware as self-knowing consciousness, while the content experiences of mind and body come and go. Be conscious of the totality of your present moment experience. Allow attention to soften, open, and expand to the whole field of perceiving space and aliveness.

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