

A TRIAD MODEL OF CONVERSATION & CONSCIOUSNESS

At the core of my (John's) approach to empathic communication is a triad "3chairs" model, which originated in the Mediate Your Life body of work I co-developed. On one level, the 3chairs model represents two opposing "disputant" chairs that 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 ourselves that are in conflict.

On a deeper level, the 3chairs model is a physical representation of dimensions of mindfulness, or consciousness. The 3 chairs represent self, other, and awareness. 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 3rd chair represents our human ability to experience awareness of the activity of our mind and body, rather than be merged and identified with these contents of awareness. Awareness is 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 triad 3Chairs Model also represents consciousness, which I define as "nondual" awareness, in which there is no subject or objects in awareness, no speaker or listener, only spacious wholeness.

Consciousness is the triad as one unified whole, the "nondual" dimension of reality. I like to think of this as the realm that quantum physicists and mystics talk about. It is awareness when it becomes truly formless and selfless -- no self or other, no form or separateness or time, and therefore no conflict. From this perspective, the contents of awareness are recognized as different manifestations of one consciousness creating and becoming temporary forms. All things are part of a larger wholeness and totality, emerging out of an unmanifested and formless source of pure potential (the unconscious). In this realm it seems there is access to unlimited, infinite possibilities for creativity, well-being, and unconditional love.

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