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Introduction

Dear reader, all you need is a strip of paper, say 20 cm long and 2 cm wide, and a pencil. At the head of the strip you write A, and at the bottom, but on the other side, you write B. And then recite two wishes over and over again so that in the end you *feel* them:

I want a line, not necessarily a straight one, that connects A and B.

The line mustn't cross over the edge of the strip.

Your problem takes the form of a contradiction between two goals. You can draw a line from A to B, but it will cross over the edge even if you join the ends so that the strip takes the form of a doughnut: A and B will still be on opposite sides. You can avoid crossing over the edge, but in that case you don't get from A to B. You can attempt a compromise, going from A almost to the edge, and then, turning the strip over, almost from the edge to B. But in that case you are cheating, as the line does not join up. You can get angry and refuse to draw a line (India), bomb the book (the USA), skip this page, reproach the author as arrogant (Norway) – in short, you can give up. Or you can read on, unless you are one of those who know about the Möbius strip or have that talent conflict workers need more than anyone else: imagination and creativity. You hold the strip in one hand and turn one end over before you join the two ends. A and B are now on the same side – in fact, everything is on the same side. The contradiction has been transcended; it no longer exists. A twist, a transformed doughnut, and the problem is solved.

But this isn't a conflict! Well, the roots of a conflict are here: contradiction. Imagine now that one side of you says 'Let's cross over the edge!', while another side says 'It's not that important that the line joins up!', a third says 'Compromise!' a fourth: 'It's a ridiculous problem, we have more important things to do!' That's four ways to avoid the challenge. But then a fifth says, let us explore with August Möbius (after whom the strip is named) the centrepiece of any transcendence: *both/and* (even with a twist).

Now we reach the nub of this book. Simple, but it is going to become more complicated as we proceed. What is important is to get a grip on the underlying ideas rather than to 'see' the solution immediately.

But first, a few words about the goals and parties in a conflict. Goals can be positive or negative, something to be pursued or something

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to be avoided. *Goals* and *life* – living beings, humans and animals, plants and micro-organisms, you and I – are inseparable. Only what is living has a goal. Without a goal life ceases to exist. One of the last goals of a dying human may be goallessness itself, eternal rest. Goals nag at us. There is no limit to the activity we undertake in order to achieve or satisfy our goals.

Where there are goals there will also often be contradictions within the same organism or between them; here and now, here or there, now or later. 'There are human beings without contradictions. They are called corpses', the Chinese say. Life, goal and contradiction are inseparable. 'Conflict prevention', preventing conflicts, is meaningless. But 'violence prevention', preventing violence, is extremely meaningful and beneficial. This book is intended as a contribution to that.

If we say that a mountain has as its goal to surge upwards, then we attribute life to that mountain. 'Oslo' and 'Norway' do not have goals, they are organisations, not organisms. But mayors, prime ministers and the chief executive officers of corporations have goals. They have life.

When an individual or group pronounces its position on the goals of cities or states they often use the word 'interests'. In doing so they are indicating that these are not randomly chosen goals from a catalogue of goals, but something deeply anchored in the organisation, in its very foundations.

But interests are often the badly concealed formulations of the goals of the leaders, for instance that a country, town, organisation should be bigger and more powerful. Maybe they think this will make them big and powerful too.

Some goals take priority over others because they are absolute, necessary conditions for the continued life of individual organisms. If they are not satisfied, life and human dignity cease to be possible. *Survival – well-being – freedom – identity* are basic needs. They are deeper than values, above values. We can choose our values, and choice is part of our freedom. Values become part of our identity; to have precisely those values is itself valued. But basic needs are different. You don't choose your basic needs; basic needs choose you. It is their satisfaction that makes you possible. If you negotiate away your own or others' basic needs, you are sentencing yourself or others to a life unworthy of human beings. You are exercising violence. Negotiation is possible where goals and values are concerned, but

not with basic needs. Basic needs have to be respected; they are non-negotiable.

In a sense satisfaction of basic needs is the only legitimate, valid interest for 'Norway', 'Oslo', the 'organisation of businesses'. Other 'interests', such as power and size, do not necessarily have to be the means of satisfying basic needs. But what we can ask from them is that they do not insult our basic needs. If they do, things begin to get serious. *Insulting basic needs – that is violence.*

Basic needs regulate the relation between you and your environment; what goes in and out of the eight openings of the human *body* (remember the skin!) Who controls that? You, or somebody else? This is not only a question of the body, but also of the *soul*, as a storehouse of perceived impressions and emotions, sometimes released in expressions.

And then there is the *spirit*, the ability to reflect on how body and soul have been deeply *programmed*, and how to change the programme. We do not attribute this capacity to animals, plants and micro-organisms, but regard them as programmed towards the very end, by 'instincts'. Basic needs cannot be negotiated away. We insult the needs of animals and plants by using them, even exterminating them. Harmony = mutual basic need satisfaction is something we have only with our pets.

Concrete examples will now lead us towards concepts and theories of conflict. We will start with conflicts within individuals (dilemmas) and between individuals (disputes). You will recognise them. This also applies to conflicts between groups such as between genders, classes, races. But try to be equally concerned with conflicts between states and nations, regions and civilisations. You read, listen, see them in the media, presented as a game between states and between corporations. But they concern you, and all readers, listeners, viewers. Democracy calls for *your* interest and knowledge. This is the message from the major popular revolts of our time, the peace movement and the Porto Alegre movement, against death and misery, against the power games of states and corporations. The movements are a shock to those who negotiate away the basic needs of millions. But today the contradictions between state/capital and the common people are being globalised and acted out at the mega-level, between regions, between civilisations.

Let us hold on to the central point in a conflict. There are goals that cannot be satisfied. They are blocked. In other words, there is *frustration*. That is bad enough. But *conflict* goes one step further.

There are at least two goals. But one obstructs the other and is carried by some Other. The relationship with a goal becomes a relationship with that Other. He may even be a part of ourselves, and in that case we can talk about a dilemma. As Goethe said, 'There are two souls in my breast.' 'Why only two?' a Frenchman retorted.

The relationship will then quickly be filled with strong emotions ranging from hatred to apathy, and contempt for one's own betrayal if a goal is abandoned or one simply escapes. The brain in the stomach communicates with diarrhoea and vomiting, with feeling faint, the twisting of the guts. You are seething. Hands that you can use to caress the one you love are clenched into fists. Colour drains from your face. The brain in your head is decoupled when you need it more than ever in order to process large quantities of facts and goals towards a sustainable solution that can be accepted and sustained.

Conflict touches everything in us, our feelings, our thoughts. Conflicts demand of us everything we have to offer. If not, our emotions will easily be expressed as violence, insulting the basic needs of others, as verbal violence, physical violence, or both.

In this book, 40 cases from real life will be explored. But let us start with the good old orange example, written up and published as a fable, *A Flying Orange Tells Its Tale*, and illustrated by Andreas Galtung.

I once used it in London at a conference on bullying between children, their parents and their teachers. There were ten tables, with two people at each table, and one orange on each table. We started with the youngest and proceeded to the oldest to see how they viewed the 'situation'. The word 'conflict' was deliberately avoided. The first person to pronounce herself was an eight-year-old girl, the best student in England in her class that year. 'I would peel the orange,' she said, 'and count the number of slices. If the number is even, I would divide by two – and then he can choose. If the number is odd, I would also divide by two and carefully divide the remaining slice into two bits.'

Totally correct, but as uncreative as those who wanted to make the division with a knife – usually men; women are more oriented towards peeling – and then slurping one half each. Others would squeeze the juice and divide it equally between two glasses. A good basis for teaching mathematics, physics and chemistry.

Then there were those who wanted to toss a coin and those who said, 'I would buy the orange!' Or the boy who wanted to fight for it. But that was the wrong answer. We wanted outcomes both parties

could accept, a sustainable way into the future, with no afterthought of revenge and/or revanche.

After a while, more creative proposals emerged. Some children wanted to play with the orange. Two girls from India simply wanted to look at it, the orange was so beautiful, 'to look together is to share it'. Then there were those who wanted to make cups out of the peel, use the peel to make cakes that could be sold, auctioned or used in a lottery. And finally there were those who wanted to plant the pips and reap the harvest in 20 years. At least 16 qualitatively different outcomes, but very few were able to arrive at more than six or seven.

The broader the spectrum of solutions, the more alternatives there are to violence. And this is the major point if we are to prevent conflict sliding into violence: use the energy conflict generates to arrive at creative solutions.