

Dear Susan,

You asked for information about double-binds, those awful situations that some people find themselves in, that can be so difficult to escape from but which it can be so empowering when we are able to transcend the trap and move on to new insights and possibilities.

As I have done a lot of work on my own double-binds and also done a lot of research, I have written this in the hope that it might possibly be of some use to people for whom this whole subject might be relevant. I wonder how easily they would be able to relate to my own story and whether they will be able to draw insights or possibly even some hope to be able to use this information to help transcend their own difficulties. If this might be the case, I am happy for you to hand this on to them, because I would be so pleased when hearing the story of my own difficulties and seeing what I have been able to make of it, might be able to help other people to grasp their own nettle and to transcend their own problems whilst recovering their true place in the world.

I'm sure that you will use your own judgement as to just how relevant and just how helpful this could be.

Having done a lot of research into this situation, both reading how other people feel these traps can be powerful and can also be transcended when we learn how, and also reflecting on my own situation and being able to find a way onwards, I realise that family life had a lot to do with creating double-binds. One parent is easy going and a person that everyone likes, whereas the other, whilst being a good person, is generally found to be difficult by some people. I had always thought that all of my double-binds came from my more difficult parent, but I have discovered that the other parent was also in a double-bind, wanting to be a good parent, but not knowing how to get out of the difficult situation that they were in and probably blaming me, the child, at least in their unconscious mind, for their difficult feelings.

And I am now sure that the child sensed that, and also in my unconscious mind I believed that I was in some way responsible for the difficult feelings that my parents experienced. It felt to me at one point in my past that my very existence caused pain to the very people on whom I relied for my existence. I called this the "Hamlet" double-bind, for it left me with the "to be or not to be" dilemma.

As I began to learn about the double bind—that "heads I loose and tails you win" scenario—I realised that it was like a trap for me, ever-ready to spring and to trap me in its steel jaws. Because when it did so I felt so disempowered and so helpless that I wasn't able to do anything to get myself out of that situation, couldn't find the words to express how I feel, and it was even difficult to think about it because that seemed to make the trap worse: I couldn't see a way out.

And so what I eventually found was that I need to deeply relax, now, as soon as I start to think about double-binds in general and especially the double-binds that are my parents' legacy to me. So now I take a deep breath in, through my nose and I hold it for a moment, just as long as is comfortable for me now (and the time gets longer as I practice this more and more), and I become aware of certain sensations in my body that remind me where I am NOW and that I am no longer that powerless small child, and as I let the breath go and relax more deeply into where I am, whether that's sitting in a comfortable chair, or lying warmly and comfortably in my bed, feeling secure, I am able to gain new insights and learnings.

As I learn how comfortable I can let myself become, I continue to breathe deeply and slowly and to let each breath bring me more comfort and more insight as I allow myself in my mind to drift away from the troubling scene to a place where I can get a different perspective on the situation and see what has been happening to me.

I like to let myself float upwards on each breath (and I know that for some people this might sound fanciful because I can tell you that it was difficult for me at first, but I find now that it works so well, and as I let myself learn more and more, you might find it easier to believe because I certainly

now do) until I can sit on a cloud with some wise companion and look down on the situation like one might view a movie or a program on TV, and I find this gives one a greater perspective, and I can see how these things happen both to me and to the characters all around me and it helps me to have compassion for all of them and even for the situation. And the perspective I can get whilst viewing the scene from above also allows me to see other ways around the impasse and that makes it possible to contemplate forgiving my parents and myself for any part that any of us may have had in creating that difficult situation because I can also then see what I have learned from it now and how that knowledge can help me sort out other situations in my life once I have got the necessary distance and perspective.

Because we all know that old saying about how it's difficult to see the wood for the trees and how, when you're up to your neck in alligators, it is sometimes difficult to remember that my original objective had been to drain the swamp, and at the time it sometimes feels like a major disaster, and I have certainly felt despair in this situation, but once I breathe deeply and relax and float up to my cloud with my wise companion it all somehow seems possible and I now feel that I know how to deal with these situations because I can learn the lessons that they have to offer people, and can make the leap to new levels of possibility on my life.

And I think you know that I have had some worries that there is some part of me that possibly sabotages the processes that work well for other people and that they don't work for me, and so I use some very simple processes that some people say straighten out our energy systems. I will write to you separately about those in case they are relevant to some people.

Hope this helps,

With my best wishes,

James