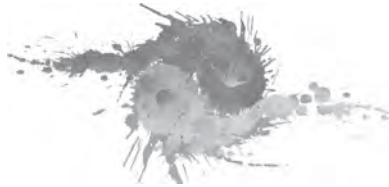


CHAPTER TWO

Awakening to the We



*We are one, after all, you and I.
Together we suffer, together exist, and
forever will recreate each other.*

~ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin

Samuel and Paula had been happily married for eight years. They lived in a beautiful apartment in San Francisco with their three small children, all under the age of six. When they came to one of my recent workshops, however, their marriage was visibly strained. They felt like they'd done nothing but fight the past few months, as they juggled two careers, children, and a busy social calendar. They'd seen a therapist and were trying to be more accommodating of each other's needs, but felt unable to recapture the kind of easy togetherness they'd once experienced.

Samuel was familiar with my teachings and hoped that if Paula joined him at my workshop, maybe they could find a solution to their problems. I asked the couple to do a practice that began with simply sitting together, being present, and then answering—one at a time and with vulnerability—the question: *What am I experiencing?*

Once they had spent a few minutes with this exercise, I asked them to turn their attention to a different question: *What are WE experiencing?* With short words and phrases, they took turns answering this question, which required that they pay attention not to their own internal thoughts and feelings, but to something else, something between them, that place where their consciousness overlapped.

After they'd been doing this practice for about ten minutes, I looked at Samuel and Paula and noticed that they appeared more relaxed and open. In fact, their faces were lit up with a sweetness that I palpably could feel, and it was obvious that they had connected in a deep way. I asked Paula what transpired, and she said, "I feel like I just found our relationship again! All these months, I thought we were working on our relationship, but in fact we were just two separate people working on ourselves or trying to change each other. We had lost touch with the place between us, the place where our connection and our love exists."

As Paula and Samuel continued to engage in the workshop practices, they didn't "fix" their problems. Instead, many of them just naturally seemed to fall away, and the couple had a bigger place to come from in dealing with those that didn't. They weren't trying to change themselves or each other anymore. Rather, they were developing and delighting in the living connection between them, and out of that space, they were finding creative ways to navigate their complex lives. More importantly, however, as Paula and Samuel rediscovered how potent their connection was, they became less and less concerned about working on their "issues." As a result, they felt much more inspired to find out what new potentials could emerge between them.

The We-Space

What Paula and Samuel's story illustrates is the most critical shift we need to make if we're interested in pursuing higher potentials of relatedness. They shifted their attention to the place where relatedness exists — the space *between* us, where we overlap and our consciousness intermingles. Most people do not pay attention to that space between us or "we-space," but it's a very real and important part of human interaction. In philosophical terms, it's called the "intersubjective" domain.

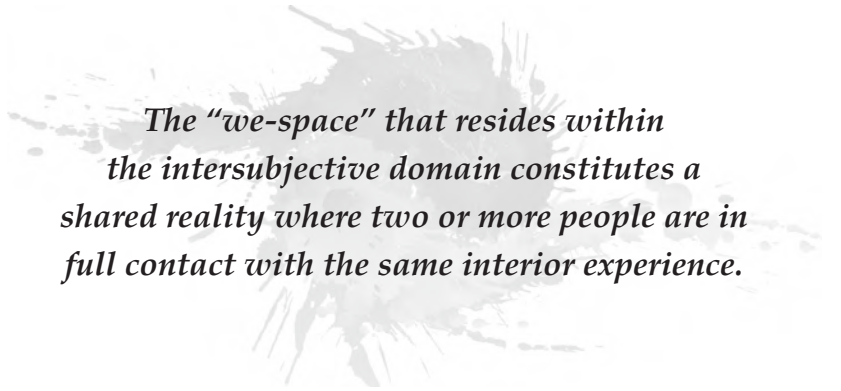
We're all familiar with the concept of "subjective" experience, which often is defined as the inner, personal, and private world that each of us lives on a momentary basis. Most of us also are familiar with the "objective" domain, which is the scientifically measurable world of objects that each of us observe and largely can agree upon.

Yet, the intersubjective domain is different: It is the shared space of consciousness which exists between two or more people. This intersubjective field is more than simply the sum of two or more individuals in communication. Because relationships have an existence of their own — an "ontological reality" as philosopher Steve McIntosh calls it¹ — this realm has its own "being." It's a shared reality where we are in full contact with the same interior experience. The current paradigm assumes that because our bodies are separate, our consciousness is distinct as well. But we've all experienced moments (if not steady states) of oneness, of being inside the same experience, *together*. Some examples of this state include love, compassion, joy, laughter, penetrating clarity, and a myriad of other experiences.

What is new about this approach to relatedness is that we consciously focus on awakening to the space between us. Rather than communicating across the distance between two bodies and two subjective realities, we are placing our consciousness "inside" the other and focus on the "we" that arises when we are in a state of true communion.

This we-space doesn't just arise in our most intimate relationships. It's a field of invisible yet powerful connectedness that we move into and which takes on different qualities when we relate to different people. Every relationship has an intersubjective dimension that reflects particular qualities and characteristics. It can be stagnant, negative or toxic, or it can be alive, dynamic, transformative and thriving. Imagine the difference between the field generated by a creative team that is brainstorming and creating a novel, world-changing idea, and the quality of the field produced by an angry, drunken mob. Consider the contrast between the vibration of an excited crowd at a football game, and the energetic frequency of a church congregation. Now, it's easy to see how the intersubjective field of relationships and groups invisibly shape what can and can't happen for the people who are a part of it. Indeed, I believe that this field shapes the group experience just as much as our surface interactions shape it. However,

most people remain unconscious of this field and sadly miss the amazing potentials that can be accessed.



*The “we-space” that resides within
the intersubjective domain constitutes a
shared reality where two or more people are in
full contact with the same interior experience.*

The fact that most people are unaware of this field of interconnectedness does not make it any less real. As Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. wrote, “We are tied together in a single garment of destiny, caught in an inescapable network of mutuality.”² Throughout the ages and across the spectrum of traditions, spiritual teachers like Dr. King have told us the same thing: *At the deepest level, we are all one and everything in this world is interdependent.* Paradoxically, this underlying oneness gives rise to the multiple unique forms in which we find ourselves. Yet, our essential nature is unity — with each other and with all of life.

Recently, science has begun to confirm this theory. Ecologists have shown us the miraculous and fragile interdependence of our planetary systems — summed up beautifully by the great naturalist John Muir, who wrote, “When we try to pick out anything by itself we find that it is bound fast by a thousand invisible cords that cannot be broken, to everything in the universe.”³ Quantum physicists have explained to us that our world is not made up of pieces of matter but of dynamic systems of energy that exist in a constant exchange of information with each other. As author and researcher Lynne McTaggart explains in *The Bond*:

*Between the smallest particles of our being, between our body
and our environment, between ourselves and all of the people with
whom we are in contact, between every member of every societal
cluster, there is a Bond — a connection so integral and profound*

that there is no longer a clear demarcation between the end of one thing and the beginning of another. The world essentially operates not through the activity of individual things but in the connection between them—in a sense, in the space between things.⁴

As we go about our day-to-day life, we tend to be unaware of what McTaggart calls “the Bond” — our deeper connection to each other and the cosmos. We hear about oneness, we read the insights of the mystics and the breakthroughs of the scientists, but then we perceive ourselves as separate objects, bumping into each other. Like Paula and Samuel, we’re often out of touch with the we-space, even in our closest relationships. Our automatic locus of awareness is ourselves and we live inside a bubble of self-concern. As a result, it takes practice and humility to penetrate the membrane of separation.

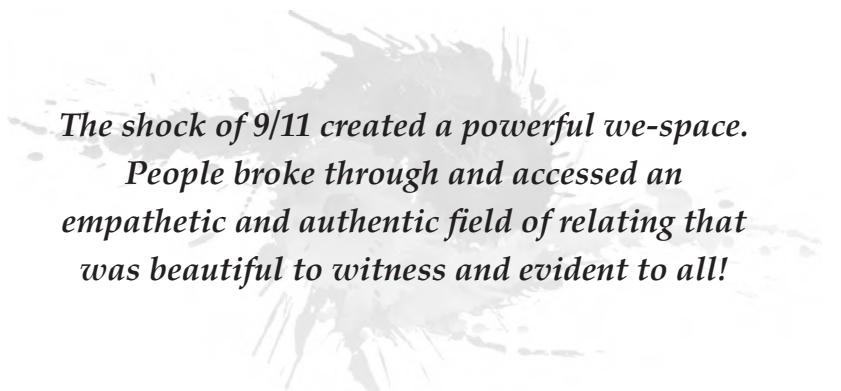
Becoming aware of the “we” immediately changes the way people relate to each other. For example, an elementary school teacher named Joan who has been working with me shared that she has seen the power of we-space among her young students. She found that when she introduces the concept of oneness to a classroom of eight-year-olds, their behavior shifts. “I remember one particular little boy,” she recalled, “who stubbornly refused to follow directions. I said to him, ‘Instead of arguing about whether you’ll do this assignment your way or my way, how about we figure out how to do it *our* way.’ He totally understood and let go of his position. We figured out together — from inside the ‘we’ — what was best for both of us.” Joan has used this concept in her classroom for years now, and she reports that it has turned the teacher-student relationship into a “creative partnership.”

Sometimes, an unexpected event shifts the intersubjective field, suddenly making us notice the we-space that previously had been absent from our awareness. After the tragic events of September 11, 2001, I heard many stories of such sudden shifts. I was teaching in New York City shortly after 9/11, and one of my students, a woman who lived on the Upper East Side, told me that as she walked around her neighborhood immediately following the tragedy, she noticed that everyone on the sidewalks seemed to be inside a shared consciousness, and people spoke more freely with one another. She said she felt connected to complete strangers in a surprising new way and that it seemed perfectly natural to be open and trusting with her fellow

New Yorkers. Similarly, a male New York resident told me that no horns were honked for several days after the towers fell. The city was unusually quiet, and there was a natural flow of cooperation and compassion that clearly was unusual for Manhattan.

Yet, the most powerful description of the post 9/11 we-space came from Tom, a man I know who is an emergency medical physician and head of a New York nonprofit. Tom regularly flies into places like Haiti to deal with the aftermath of disasters. Normally, when he arrives at a strange hospital there is an immediate resistance from the staff members, who vie for position and express other aspects of ego. But when Tom went downtown to help with the 9/11 rescue, he said there was an unexpected openness and holistic connection that allowed everyone to work together in a flow of efficiency that he's never experienced since. He said that he and his trauma teammates moved and responded as one organism.

It seems to me that it was the shock of 9/11 which awakened people. Residents of New York City suddenly became connected inside a field of relating that is very different than the reality in which we normally exist. They shared an unusual level of openness and vulnerability. Imagine if the consciousness of New York could have remained inside that level of connectedness, flow, and love for not just a few days, but for a year or more?



***The shock of 9/11 created a powerful we-space.
People broke through and accessed an
empathetic and authentic field of relating that
was beautiful to witness and evident to all!***

I am passionate about teaching the underlying principles that will allow human beings to relate from that kind of connection and concern for one another, and I am not the only one. My colleague Andrew Venezia in his paper "I, We, All" writes, "Many of our crises today as a global humanity stem from our inability to interface and relate with each other, in small and

large scopes, from such a [we-space]. Our technological sophistication has outstripped our ability to create beauty and goodness.”⁵

We fail to reach this level of relating partly due to cultural pressures. In the United States over the past half-century, our culture has encouraged an increasingly individualistic worldview. However, some of us also have been taught to follow our hearts and sense of purpose, to resist bowing to convention, to create healthy boundaries and also respect the boundaries of those we love. This is a positive and important cultural development, but it is not enough. Now, we need to find the courage to move beyond our separate spheres of enhanced individuality, to connect more deeply, and to awaken the sensitivities necessary for collective evolution. As we begin to pay attention to the “intersubjective” dimension of our experience, we will discover how to be in relationship not just with each other, but with the “we” and our greater humanity.

We also fail to reach this level of relating because our awareness generally is focused on the gross level, that which appears to be solid and material and separated in space. As we pay attention and become more sensitized to the intersubjective field, we begin to experience more subtle levels of consciousness that permit us to sense the invisible realms of reality such as subtle energies, inner sounds, visions, smells, tastes, and touch. When this unseen relational field awakens, we become more alive, more vivid, more dimensionally rich. This we-space is vibrant and expansive, and it reveals deeper levels of reality.

Who Is Relating?

The potential for Evolutionary Relationship emerges when two or more people become aware of the field between them and when the field becomes aware of itself. Just as an individual can become “self-aware,” so too can this “we-space” become conscious of itself ... but only if we become conscious of it, *together*. But before I can explain how to activate this extraordinary potential for an awakened “we,” there’s one more critical question we need to explore.

Relationships are affected by many factors, but one of the most important components is: *Who is doing the relating?* Spiritual work is always a matter of

identity. The great mystics reached enlightenment by asking the question: *Who am I?* And anyone who has done even a little psychological or spiritual work will be familiar with the notion that there is more than one of us “in there.” Though there are many ways of describing the different dimensions of the self, for the purposes creating an Evolutionary Relationship, we need to focus on two particular dimensions. The first I will call the “ego-self,” and the second, the “essential self.”

The ego can be described as our fixed sense of identity that we develop in childhood through our relationships with other people and the environment. Our sense of self begins to form around self-images that are fixed, repetitive, limited, and familiar. Through the experiences of our childhood, the structures of our ego develop and provide us with an everyday sense of self-recognition. The ego’s fixed and repetitive nature gives us a stable sense of self—a center from which to live and engage with the world. The ego also is experienced as a platform for constant inner activity: thinking, feeling, hoping, planning, ceaselessly reinforcing and validating our sense of self. Fundamentally, the ego is a closed system that works to maintain itself. By seeing our habitual ways of being and doing, we realize the ego is repetitive and almost mechanistic.

On the other hand, the essential self is the experience of being free from external reference points. It is a sense of self that does not depend on self-images, ideas, feelings, sensations, hopes, or fixed impressions. Rather, it is self-existent, which means it is not conditioned by our parents, our education, or our culturally adaptive qualities or characteristics. The essential self is our true self, the sense of identity which arises from our core essence.

*The essential self is a sense of being
that originates from Source.
It is our true nature, and it is deeper than
our current experience in this incarnation.*

Thus, the essential self represents our true nature, making it deeper than the history of our current incarnation. It's the face that we had before we were born. If we had a different body, different name, or different sex, it's who we are and who we are seen and known to be by those who love us best. Indeed, the people who truly love us recognize what I call the "origination point." Each of us has an origination point, a point of light that comes from the source of our existence, which radiates into the world and expresses itself in the form of our particular life.

Often it is easier to recognize the origination point in others. Just think about someone whom you've deeply loved over time. Contemplate that person's indefinable and unique essence — what you love about him or her. Your relatedness to that person comes from a place you may not fully cognize, yet you are drawn to this person irrevocably, by a distinct and mysterious sense of mutual attraction.

Now, imagine being in touch with your own origination point or essential nature. It is a space that feels like home. Your essential self also should feel dynamic, since it is an open system and a field of consciousness that evolves, grows, and constantly exchanges information with the cosmos. Consequently, your essential self is not stagnant. It is capable of developing new structures that contain greater consciousness and complexity, and it integrates and releases old structures as needed. Others sense when you are alive at this level of spiritual maturity, when you are ready, willing, and able to dissolve old ego structures that limit or compromise your essential nature.

Here are some more clues to help you unveil your essential nature. As your sense of identity shifts from ego to essence, you will experience a sense of being natural and free. You feel like you are effortlessly yourself—authentic, distinct, and unique. You find you no longer draw comparisons between yourself and others, nor are you trying to be "someone." When in touch with your origination point, your sense of self flows naturally and unselfconsciously.

Lastly, I wish to underscore that the essential self is impressionable, always morphing and changing, fluid and flexible. Thus, the experience of living from essence is one of discovering who we are at our core and who we are evolving and maturing to be. I have a student I've worked with for over twenty years who now is eighty-seven years old. She is an artist in New York City and she is radiant, delighting in her life and in herself.

She managed to release her soul from her ego long ago, and she will be evolving until her last moment on Earth. She's an inspiration to me, as she demonstrates that being alive and growing has nothing to do with the body or aging process. Conversely, some people only identify with their ego and stop growing early in life. When we identify with the fixed qualities of our ego, we settle for a closed system and we experience entropy and disintegration. Old age only applies to the ego. The essential self is an open system that endlessly evolves.

Awakening Mutuality

The field of relatedness has been described by many philosophers, physicists, sociologists, and mystics, but I particularly like the one-word definition offered by Dr. King: *mutuality*. In ordinary usage, mutuality connotes reciprocity, sharing, partnership, and mutual benefit. In my work, I use it to refer to that place where souls overlap — a confluence of consciousness. Mutuality also points to the fact that relationship is a two-way street, where two or more individuals agree to be consciously related.

Unfortunately, many relationships suffer from lack of real mutuality, with one person using the other person to fulfill his or her own wants and needs. As previously explained, when we relate from our egos, we unconsciously see others as separate, as images, as objects of desire, protection, help, advancement, comfort, and so forth. Generally speaking, most relationships are an interplay of separate people interacting and exchanging, but never really communing or entering into the depth of union I am pointing to. That's because ego identity always filters: it creates a particular image of the self and a particular image of the other, and it is those two images that come together rather than our essential selves. When I use the term self-image, I don't just mean a visual picture of the self. It's a solid and compelling sense of self, more akin to a virtual reality. It's a sense of self that is informed by our senses and subjective observation, all of which seems perfectly normal.

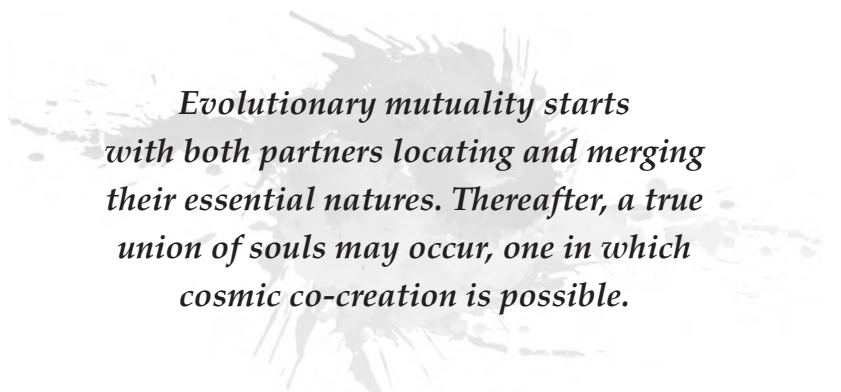
For example, if my self-image tells me I'm small and delicate and need protection and support, whereas my partner is seen as big and strong, then these two images will connect together in a powerful attachment. It may

seem like a great relationship, but in actuality it is just two self-images fitting neatly together. No real contact is occurring between this couple, and the relationship will work only so long as neither one sees through the illusions of ego, which probably were developed in childhood. When our relationships are based on these types of superficial and unexamined images, there is no real or authentic exchange. The relationship initially may feel stable, but eventually the stagnation and lack of true contact will make it difficult for this connection to be sustained, particularly if one of the partners starts to awaken.

Again, mutuality emerges when two or more people occupy the same space in consciousness. As Sufi scholar Kabir Helminski writes, “Two stones cannot occupy the same space, but two fragrances can.”⁶ Truly, our souls are more akin to fragrances than stones because they are permeable, able to commingle without losing their essence or their autonomy, while our egos always remain separate, like two stones tumbling in the ocean of consciousness but never blending with it.

However, once we access mutuality with a partner, we start to contact the relationship itself, like Paula and Samuel achieved. When starting from a place of deeper unity, we bypass the clash of wills, ulterior motive, and hidden agendas. We are awake and present and honestly see each other. We can tune in and listen to what the relationship itself desires, what it’s ready for, and what potential it contains. Then, if we want those potentials to be fulfilled, we can elect to work together to expand and deepen our experience of mutuality. What I call “evolutionary mutuality” is a true union of souls, in which there is an unbounded merging of the essential self of both individuals, who each remain distinct and unique but who achieve a heightened state of awareness and engage in dynamic interplay.

Mutual awakening starts with moving beyond our separate sense of self into full and immediate contact with our essential nature. Only then, may we come into reality with another. Once we become aware of our inner essence in all its fullness, the next stage is to connect with the inner experience of the other. When this is achieved by both partners, a sacred space is created where the partners become aware of the field of relatedness between them. At the final stage, we may access multi-dimensional awareness, which means we simultaneously become aware of self, other, the space of relatedness, and often many other different dimensions as well.



***Evolutionary mutuality starts
with both partners locating and merging
their essential natures. Thereafter, a true
union of souls may occur, one in which
cosmic co-creation is possible.***

Mutual awakening is the process of coming into reality together. Instead of autonomically focusing on our individual, subjective world, we lean toward each other, into the “space between” and discover our innate unity and capacity to be inside reality as one. We find that reality is dimensionally rich and layered. Science has accepted that hidden dimensions and unseen realms make up a greater portion of the universe than the physical, visible elements. The surprising gift is that when we practice mutual awakening, we not only develop a quality of consciousness that is more fluid and intimate, we simultaneously become aware of different dimensions. This multi-dimensional awareness allows us to move beyond a separate sense of self into full and immediate contact with our own distinct and essential nature, while also experiencing the essence of the other and together entering into an awakened consciousness. This field is enlivened by our presence, and we are enlivened by it. Our shared consciousness is a portal to unlimited potentials and often, extraordinary experiences that take us beyond realities we previously have known.

Mutual awakening can occur with more than two people, but it only comes into existence when a group pays attention to the space between them within the greater field. When we meet others beyond the separation of egoic consciousness, something miraculous happens. We fall through the rabbit hole into a deeper, always present reality that is dynamic and alive. Love permeates everything and creativity abounds.

By learning to let go and enter this field together, we awaken simultaneously—it’s never just happening to one person. This is an entirely different process than the kind of individual awakening that has been

described for thousands of years by spiritual mystics, with their myriad techniques and practices. Instead, mutual awakening is an invitation to become something greater together, though spirit. What's exciting is how available it is, as though consciousness itself has been waiting for us to pay attention in the right way. When we do pay attention, we experience the mystical depths of shared unity, and we shift our normal way of being and acting in the world.

Mutual awakening is the first stage of the WEvolution — a movement of attraction and expansion between two or more people who wish to give and receive at higher and higher levels. The more energy is exchanged, the more mutuality occurs. This reciprocity of energy, attention, and love creates access to unending dynamism and new evolutionary potentials. In this heightened state, Evolutionary Relationships serve as channels for our connection to each other and to the greater intelligence and energy of the cosmos, the universal mystery and greater reality to which all of us are connected. As the Bible states, “Where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst.”⁷

Notes

- 1 Carter Phipps, *Evolutionaries: Unlocking the Spiritual and Cultural Potential of Science's Greatest Idea*, New York, NY: Harper Perennial, 2012, p. 169.
- 2 Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., “Letter from a Birmingham Jail,” 1963, Stanford University Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute, <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/letter-birmingham-jail>.
- 3 Stephen Fox, *John Muir and His Legacy: The American Conservation Movement*, Boston, MA: Little, Brown and Company, 1981, p. 291.
- 4 Lynn McTaggart, *The Bond: Connecting Through the Space Between Us*, New York, NY: Atria Books, 2012, pp. xxiv-xxv.
- 5 Andrew Venezia, “I, We, All: Intersubjectivity and We Space, Post-Metaphysics, and Human Becoming,” 2013, <http://studylib.net/doc/9722222/venezia-i-we-all>, p. 60.
- 6 Kabir Edmund Helminski, *Living Presence: A Sufi Way to Mindfulness & the Essential Self*, New York, NY: TarcherPerigee, 1992, p. 130.
- 7 Matthew 18:20, New American Standard Bible.