A Personal Reflection on Commitment 2

By Kim Kristenson-Lee, ITP Teacher

I seek to join in community with other ITP practitioners. While maintaining my individual autonomy and authority, I commit myself to my ITP community in vision and practice. I understand that just two people can make a community. I also know that I can create a community through electronic networks, or even practice alone, bolstered by the greater ITP community.



When George Leonard and Michael Murphy articulated the ITP Commitments for the first time I wondered, what were they thinking? I find it strikingly paradoxical that right after articulating the value of maintaining ones' own authority (commitment #1), George and Michael immediately articulated the importance of joining in community with others (commitment #2). Why this tension in intention? This paradox challenges me and also can expand us as practitioners.

Why is this topic so important now? Because as we end 2020, Americans are living in "the dis-United States." We are trying to reconcile vastly different realities. A practice system that reconciles individual authority and being in community is essential to our healing process. Commitment to one's community is more important than ever. The choices we make and our engagement in community matters, matters immensely. Theoretical physicist David Bohm says:

"Human thought is a system like other systems and yet, there is a flaw in the system. The flaw is, human thought is in fragments, you have a fragment and I have a fragment. If we are not in relationships to share our fragments, we will continue to make decisions with fragmented thinking."

Here are some challenging questions.

- If I am to be my own authority, what does it mean to also commit myself to my ITP community?
- Under what circumstances does expressing my individual authority take precedence over being in community?
- Under what circumstances does expressing my commitment to the community take precedence over individual considerations?

Maddingly, from where I sit, it depends!

Let's talk about a "simple" example - mask wearing. Is it a violation of my individual authority to submit to CDC guidelines? Is wearing a mask a way to protect my community and people I care about? Can both views be true? What else is possible? Could the process of exploring these divergent views in community be equally or even important than the finding the correct answers?

The magical challenge of community is to become better versions of "me" and "we", holding the paradox. It means both suspending judgments and acknowledging judgments. It means searching inside oneself and remaining together in collective exploration. It means holding a willingness to be surprised. It means presuming positive intent despite different views. This means seeing through multiple lenses.

We need community to evolve into ever better versions of ourselves. And we need each person to maintain his or her own authority. Without bringing every voice to the circle, every view, our picture of reality is incomplete. So, as a solution to the ills of today, I leave you with an additional thought from David Bohm. Here is your invitation to live into the paradox during this holiday season, as you sit with your closest community members:

"It is proposed that a form of free dialogue may well be one of the most effective ways of investigating the crisis which faces society, and indeed the whole of human nature and consciousness today. Moreover, it may turn out that such a form of free exchange of ideas and information is of fundamental relevance for transforming culture and freeing it of destructive misinformation, so that creativity can be liberated."

A-ho!!