

## A Brief Description of Deep Democracy

by Amy and Arnold Mindell

In this brief article, we describe one of the central concepts of Process oriented Psychology, called Deep Democracy. It applies to individuals in all states of consciousness, and it applies as well to relationships, group process, politics, creativity and working with people in near death and comatose states.

### **Deep Democracy, Politics, and Group Process**

Democracy is, in essence, “a dream still trying to happen.” Arnold Mindell’s concept of “deep democracy” (1992) states that *awareness* is needed to literally bring democracy’s most cherished beliefs and ideals to life. Without awareness, we are not able to discover sustainable resolutions to individual, group and world issues.

Political discourse, social action, community meetings, and city forums run the danger of striving for outer change only, while potentially repeating history.

The root meaning of the word *democracy* is associated with power, not awareness. In Greek, *demos* means citizen, and *kratie* means power. Democracy comes from the root words literally meaning citizen power. But without awareness of our capacity to interact, social power alone will never solve our interactional problems.

Awareness helps us embrace *all aspects* of our experiences. It makes it possible to notice and bring into discussions not only the most overt issues and facts of a given situation or dialogue, but also the background feelings, dreams, and visions that, if kept hidden, tend to disturb any attempt to create sustainable reconciliation or resolution inside ourselves, in our relationships, and groups.

The philosophy and practice of deep democracy, and what is called Worldwork, (process oriented small and large group work) claims that all people, parts, and feelings are needed. Deep democracy appreciates present democratic forms but adds to them the need for awareness of feelings and the atmosphere in moment-to-moment interactions and institutional practices.

### **Dimensions of Experience**

A deeply democratic attitude recognizes that there are various *dimensions of experience* within each of us and every group interaction. Every group (and individual) has a *consensual reality* (i.e., a set of assumptions, beliefs, and perceptions that is held by the majority to constitute reality) *as well as other dreaming realities* or dimensions that are ordinarily unseen yet lie behind the known consensual reality. These dreaming dimensions include all of the feelings and dreams hidden within our more overt communication. The dreaming dimensions include: the *Dreamland level* which includes background feelings, unnoticed communication signals, and group roles. The Dreaming

dimension also includes the *Essence level* which refers to the most subtle, sentient experiences which can hardly be spoken about, and the deep wisdom in the background of individual and group life.

Without training, groups and individuals tend to focus only upon that with which they identify as real and therefore they miss important subtle dreaming aspects of communication. It is only when *all dimensions of reality* are recognized and acknowledged that the wisdom of the individual, relationship, group, or community emerges.

### **Dreaming and Creativity**

Just as we need to expand our awareness to notice all levels of experience, this expanded awareness is a key to the creative process.

Many years ago, Arny discovered that we do not only *dream at night*, but there is a continual *dreaming process* happening all the time. Therefore, you do not have to go to sleep at night to dream, but you can step into the dreaming process *at any time* in order to discover a great deal of wisdom and next steps trying to come to our awareness. Spontaneous movements and gestures, body symptoms, and flickering experiences are some of the ways that the dreaming process manifests in everyday life. Amazingly, if we follow and unfold these occurrences, they actually mirror our nighttime dream images. Each of us has access to this dreaming process. At any moment, we can notice the way the dreaming process is trying to emerge, step into its current, and discover new information and wisdom for everyday life.

At the same time, the dreaming process is an endless source of *creativity*; it is the core or seed from which the creative process springs. If you notice the dreaming and step into its flowing river, you can catch new ideas and inspiration that, when unfolded, are the beginnings of surprising and spontaneous creative expression.

### **Flirts ☺**

One of the easiest ways to notice the presence of the dreaming process is to catch a “flirt.” Flirts are the first way that the deepest essence level expresses itself. Flirts appear as quick, evanescent, nonverbal sensations, visual flickers, moods, and hunches that suddenly catch our attention. For example, your attention might be grabbed for a split second by the brilliant color of a flower or the chirping sound of a bird.

The moment you notice a flirt, you have caught the tip of a creative process in the midst of unfolding. By holding your attention and meditating on that flirt, it will unfold into dreamlike images and fantasies, and finally emerge into everyday reality in terms of various artistic expressions. For example a leaf blowing gently in the wind or the sound of the spinning wheels of a car, might unfold into a melody that turns into a full song, movements which develop into a choreographed dance, or the beginning of a special character which becomes a unique puppet.

## **Coma and Near Death States of Consciousness**

Embracing both our everyday reality and deeper dreaming dimensions also helps us communicate with people in non-ordinary states of consciousness.

For example, although medical understanding of people in comatose states assumes that the comatose person is unaware and unresponsive, we have found that people in coma are traveling through meaningful inner states of consciousness. By using special communication methods adapted to the person's altered state, we can communicate with the comatose person and relieve the isolation that family and friends often feel when confronted by a loved one who seems "out of reach"

In order to accompany and communicate with a person in coma or near death, it is important to shift levels and notice the most minute, subtle, essence level body signals such as the slight movements and gestures of the face, hands, feet, eyebrows, vocal sounds, rate of breathing, etc. By joining and following these signals, the comatose person feels deeply related to and is assisted in their inner journey.

No matter what physical or psychological condition a person is in, the person is full of "process", that means signals and experiences. That person needs as much loving attention and sensitive communication as a person in what we think of as a "normal" state of consciousness.

By appreciating and shifting our awareness to different dimensions of consciousness, we can appreciate and follow the unique nature of each person in just about all states of consciousness.

### **More Information about Deep Democracy?**

See Arny's many books including *The Leader as Martial Artist* and *The Leader's 2<sup>nd</sup> Training* and Amy's various books including *The Dreaming Source of Creativity* and *Coma: A Healing Journey*. [www.aamindell.net](http://www.aamindell.net)