

## Levels of Reality

When I first heard about levels of reality as described by Arnold Mindell in my relationship coaching training, it was as if a huge flash of bright light exploded through my brain, filling me with insight, understanding and peace. With this new wisdom metaphor so very much that was troubling and conflict ridden began to make sense. I wasn't crazy (or not so much so), I wasn't unreliable, those around me weren't trying to sabotage my grand plans. It was as if I'd just gotten my universal translator or my Rosetta Stone. With this I could be so much better at deciphering what was happening in my life and in my relationships. I now offer you this summary in the hopes that it provides you with a spark of insight as well.

In his book, [Dreaming While Awake](#), Arnold Mindell shares what he has learned from his work as a therapist and from spiritual teachers from around the world including the Aboriginal peoples of Australia. There are three levels of reality, he says, and all are operating and available to us all the time.

The level we are most familiar with is that of every day life, of **Consensus Reality**. This is the level of facts, figures, objective measurements, tasks, events, people, to-do lists, manifested reality. The Aboriginal peoples consider this like the illuminated side of the moon – it's what we see and experience. It's called consensus because we all (in our own cultures) agree on what we are considering to be real. Based on what we agree are units of measure we can describe the size of a room or anything else. In consensus reality things are concrete, definable, measurable and often predictable.

Before things manifest in consensus reality they exist in our dreams. This level of reality is referred to in relationship coaching (ORSC, see below) as the **Dreaming Level**. Mindell calls this the Dreamland. This is the level of our hopes and fears, our dreams and our values, our emotions and our projections. This is where we imagine change. In this level things are subjective or dualistic– I have my dreams and you have yours. So there is no objective truth in this level, only each of our truths from our individual experiences. The room that I could objectively measure in Consensus Reality may feel very large or quite small to me depending on what's on the other side of it – like my young child in need or a dangerous person.

From quantum physics we learn about the participative nature of the universe. The act of observing something on a quantum level changes what is happening. Or, as I like to say it, what we look for is what we get. If we look for light to behave as particles it does. If we look for it to behave as a wave, it does. From the ORSC certification training manual, "...the Dreaming Level of Reality is about the Co-Active nature of our world. What we look for influences what we find. Together with our hopes, dreams, fears, expectations, and projections, we shape our world. Through awareness (observation) we co-create our existence. It is through observation and awareness that we change reality.... We participate with our universe in dreaming-up our reality...."

At the root of both of these levels is the **Sentient Essence Level** (ORSC) or what Mindell calls the Dreamtime or The Dreaming. This is the level before words, before any separation at all. This is the place of pure potential, of all possibilities. There is no “I” here, no duality, for on this level all is one. This is where light is both wave and particle. It is the probability or tendency for something to happen.

Since this level is preverbal it’s tough to clearly articulate it, but we all know it. When we have the sense of the essential nature of someone or something, we are tapping into this level. An example given in ORSC is the essence of dog-ness. There are all kinds and shapes of dogs yet even a 2 year old with limited exposure to the varieties of dogs can immediately identify a dog regardless of the breed or what the dog looks like. There is an essence of dog-ness that a child can recognize. We feel the Sentient Essence level when we have immediate responses to things – we just know if we are attracted or repulsed by something despite not having words to express why. We just know the essence nature of each of our relationships. What we sense of this level of reality tends to be eternal and indestructible, experienced in just a moment and not expressible in words.

The Dreaming and the Sentient Essence Level are considered by the Aboriginal peoples to be the dark side of the moon – even if we can’t fully see it we know it is there.

The flow begins in the Sentient Essence Level of all possibilities. From this a tendency leads to the Dreaming Level of ideas, feelings, and imagining. Out of the dreaming something is then born into the Consensus Reality Level. All levels are alive in us and acting on us all the time. And both individuals and our relationships need awareness and navigation of each of the levels.

Now, can you see why this was such an enlightening teaching for me? What I understood from this is where much of our conflict and our strength comes from – dancing along these levels. Just some examples:

If I stay focusing on what has to happen in Consensus Reality too long I can feel uninspired, lacking energy, and lifeless. I’m feeling the need to connect with the Dreaming and maybe the Sentient Essence Level.

If I stay in the Dreaming all the time, then I don’t operate in Consensus Reality long enough to manifest those dreams. All my good ideas are just that – ideas and not reality.

Sometimes I can feel the Sentient Essence and not have words to express what I’m sensing. Rather than discount this wisdom because it can’t be objectively measured I can now value it for the ground of being that it is.

In relationship with others I can now see why when I’m dreaming my big dreams and someone else is living from Consensus Reality, their response to my dreams can feel like a direct attack or completely bubble bursting. I can also understand why those who are good at sensing the Essence Level may not be able to logically argue their points. It also makes sense why some of us just speak the same language – we’re coming from the same

level of reality. And I can understand how we might resist having to express one level of reality repeatedly for the sake of a relationship– if my husband always handles Consensus Reality then I may feel the need to always keep the Dreaming and the Essence in our relationship and that may get old for both of us.

For successful and fulfilled experiences we individually need to be able to access the strengths/wisdom/gifts of each level of reality. For, again, without that we may have everything handled in the “real” world and no passion in our lives. Or we may not be able to “live on love alone”. So despite our preferences for coming from one of these levels we need to navigate all of them.

The same is true for our relationships. Have you ever been in a relationship where in Consensus Reality everything was completely smooth yet it just didn’t work? Or one where you dreamed in sync but it just didn’t work in Consensus Reality? Or maybe you’ve been in a relationship where you had to handle all the real world details or nothing would get done? Sustainable relationships need someone attending to each of the levels of reality. When we understand this, when we have this awareness, then we can be conscious and intentional regarding who attends to what level and for how long for the sake of the relationship. That way if I get sick and tired of making sure the real world is handled while you dream up our big plans, we can trade of responsibilities – again, for the sake of our relationship. In different relationships we may champion different levels of reality. And that may contribute to our sense of satisfaction or lack within the relationship. You might say the levels of reality belong to the relationship and the need to have them tended to is called for by the relationship for it to survive and thrive.

In organizations different departments can be responsible for holding the various level of reality. As we all probably know those in charge of the money often hold the Consensus Reality Level. If they don’t there could be trouble ahead for the organization. And good marketers know how to capture and express the Sentient Essence even without words. Those values and vision statements remind everyone of the Dreaming Level or purpose of the organization.

How are those lightening-like flashes of insight coming now? There’s a lot to process here, I know. Here are some questions you could consider:

What’s your preferred operating level of reality?

Think of some of the relationships you are in. What are you aware of regarding the way each relationship handles the levels of reality? What level does each relationship call on you to occupy?

What conflicts can you now see may be coming from different people speaking the language of differing levels?

What level of reality to you feel called to pay more attention to in your life?

Is there some place in your life or in a relationship of yours where you feel something missing that might be from loss of contact with the Essence or Dreaming levels? What could you do about that?

For more about the levels of reality check out Arnie Mindell's [Dreaming While Awake](#). For more about ORSC, or Organization and Relationship Systems Coaching, go to the Center for Right Relationship ([www.centerforrightrelationship.com](http://www.centerforrightrelationship.com)). For a sample of personal coaching or relationship coaching, contact me at [Christine@hawkview.net](mailto:Christine@hawkview.net) or at 970-353-5535. Or visit my website: [www.hawkview.net](http://www.hawkview.net).

Here's to successful swimming in each of the levels of magnificent reality!

(Note the preference towards dreaming there?)

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