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I think the trouble really started because of some celery. Three years of conflict with my sister-in-law over some celery. It might be hard to believe, but it is the experience I lived through. Of course, it was not just the celery. At the time, I was living with my brother and his wife. As with anyone you end up living with, there are tiny differences of habit, of little eccentricities, which cause annoyance and grief. So it was in this house, but my reaction was to just ignore it, or try to make room for it. Of course, this policy fell apart when we got to the celery.

I had moved out and all communication had ceased. Times were very tense. My brother and his wife had their first child, and I was not able to come to see my new little nephew. The fall-out from our fighting meant I did not get to see my brother much either, and this rift was causing a lot of pain to others in the family.

This insanity lasted for one year. In this time, I had come to the conclusion that what was needed is honesty. If only I had been open about all the things that had annoyed me earlier, the celery incident would not have happened. I looked back at the past, and it quickly dawned on me that I had been at fault 1% of the time, and my sister-in-law 99%.

A simple solution presented itself: if I could just open her eyes, with honesty, then surely peace will come from it. We arranged to meet. At this meeting we tried to look at all the past incidents. I become very frustrated that her ideas of the past were quite different to my own. Honesty from me did not bring peace, it just got her even more upset. She left the meeting very bitter, and I was confused.

Ok, honesty did not work. Perhaps I needed to include another aspect: unselfishness. I thought “ok, so maybe I’ll take 10% of the blame, and I’ll even apologise for my tiny part of the past”. Now that was real unselfishness, if I may say so. Wow, with unselfishness, I was sure peace will come real soon. It took another year before we met.

In this second meeting, with unselfishness as my guide, I was sure to succeed. I started the meeting with apologising for those small incidents where I could have been, maybe just a little, at fault. My sister-in-law took my apology. Then I waited. And Waited. Yet, to my great surprise, she did not apologise. I became outraged – she was trying to make it look like it was all my fault, couldn’t she see that she was 90% wrong?!? Had she so quickly forgot her own role in all this mess? Well, I had to apply a lot of honesty to remind her of what really happened. Unfortunately, I don’t think I kept my emotions very well in check and had to leave the meeting – fuming and furious.

It had been a complete failure. Try to give a little unselfishly and the other just takes it all and gives nothing back! There definitely was no peace between us. How could there be if the effort was all so one sided?

Time passes. My nephew is growing up, but I see him only on photos or the very rare family occasion. This conflict is costing us a very high price.

It slowly dawns on me, that indeed, my motives have never been about peace. Either I was trying to prove something, or about who was right, or even about being generous. It had never been just about peace. I saw then the need for purity, the purity of motive which had been ignored in the previous meetings.

This time, when we were going to meet, I was going just for peace. It took another year before we met for afternoon tea. I brought a cake along too, it always helps. This time, I did not talk about the past, or about who was right, or what percentage of fault was mine or hers. We just started afresh, a first very delicate, gentle step towards peace. And, I got to meet my nephew; he was already over 3 years old.

My experience of conflict with my sister-in-law has taught me a lot of things. About what it means to be living together, about the power of motives, and the fragile nature of relationships. The key lesson however has been: avoid celery! It is the root of all conflict, or is that a legume, or tuber? Anyway, I hope you take my story seriously, do not go anywhere near celery whatever you do.

Thank you.