

How Do I Hold Two Truths at Once?

Read the article first. This worksheet accompanies [Dialectics - open your mind and balance will occur naturally](#) at ThoughtsFromATherapist.com, which explains the difference between a dichotomy (the chicken or the egg) and a dialectic (the chicken and the egg). Search “dialectics open your mind” on the site to find it.

A dichotomy says everything is good or bad. A dialectic says everything is good and bad. The move is “and,” never “or.” Choose one tension that keeps coming back: inside ourselves, with someone close, or about a shared problem. Start with a fairly ordinary one. A few words per space is enough.

STEP ONE Write the tension	Write it the way it usually sounds, with “or” or “but.” The word “but” often creates a false dichotomy, as though only one half can be true.
STEP TWO Rewrite it with “and”	Keep both halves at full strength. Softening either one to make the sentence comfortable defeats the point.
STEP THREE What each side protects	Name what each side protects, which is often different from what it says: safety, dignity, belonging, continuity, freedom from, freedom to. <i>If this side got its way, what would I be free from, or free to experience?</i>
STEP FOUR When one side wins completely	The failure is usually the dominance, not the position. We name the cost when each side runs without the other.
STEP FIVE The accuracy check	Dialectical thinking is not neutrality. Sometimes two things are true at once. Sometimes each side holds part of it. Sometimes one side really is more accurate, and the honest move is to say so.
STEP SIX One behavior	Holding both is something we do, not a midpoint we settle on. We choose one concrete action that respects both sides.

A WORKED EXAMPLE: THE SKIING BUDDY

WITH “BUT”	I like going skiing with my friend, but he has health care views I disagree with.
WITH “AND”	I like going skiing with my friend, and he has health care views I disagree with.
WHAT EACH PROTECTS	The friendship protects belonging and joy. The disagreement protects integrity: my views matter to me.
ONE SIDE WINS	Belonging wins: I pretend to agree. Integrity wins: I lose a skiing buddy over something that has nothing to do with skiing.
ACCURACY	On health care, one of us may be more accurate, and that conversation can still happen. The friendship does not depend on settling it.
ONE BEHAVIOR	Call him about Saturday.

The tension, both ways

Write the tension as it usually sounds, then hold both halves together.

THE TENSION, WITH "OR" OR "BUT"

The way it sounds in my head or in the argument.

THE SAME TENSION, WITH "AND"

Both halves at full strength. Read it aloud and notice how the body responds.

TWO SIDES

What each side says

The position as each side would state it, in its own best words.

SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

UNDERNEATH

What each side protects

Safety, dignity, belonging, continuity, freedom from, freedom to, or something else.

SIDE ONE PROTECTS

SIDE TWO PROTECTS

DOMINANCE

When one side wins completely

What gets lost when this side runs without the other?

IF SIDE ONE WINS COMPLETELY

IF SIDE TWO WINS COMPLETELY

Loosening the grip

Holding a tension is different from giving up a position.

THE FEAR

We create dichotomies to make life feel more predictable. Loosening one can feel like losing ground.

IF I LOOSEN MY GRIP ON MY SIDE, I AM AFRAID THAT...

WHAT I WOULD BE GIVING UP, AND WHAT I WOULD KEEP:

THE ACCURACY CHECK

Which fits this tension best? Check one, or more than one if the tension has parts.

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☐ Both things are true at the same time | ☐ Each side holds part of it |
| ☐ One side is more accurate here, and I can say so honestly | ☐ Both sides are using a frame that needs to change |

Why I checked what I checked:

HOLDING AS AVOIDANCE

Seeing every side can become a way of never standing for our own. Holding tension forever, without taking a position when the situation needs one, is its own failure.

IS THERE A POSITION HERE THAT IS MINE TO TAKE? WHAT IS IT?

ONE BEHAVIOR THIS WEEK

Not a midpoint. A concrete action that shows both sides held at once.

WHAT I WILL DO:

WHEN, AND WITH WHOM:

HOW I WILL KNOW BOTH SIDES WERE RESPECTED:

Dialectics can let us observe without the judgments that call for decisive action. In this way we keep more of the people we disagree with.