

1 **II. FL theory of change**

2 The phenomenon of change will be discussed in greater depth in a chapter of the full-length text.

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13 **A. ISSUES OF CHANGE AND CONTROL**

14 **Feedback Learning (FL) regards change as a constant.** The assumption is that behavioral, physical, and
 15 environmental changes are happening all the time, whether we choose to be aware of them, or to actively
 16 participate in them, or not. Change of any kind only happens within the limits of very broad genetic parameters, in
 17 the context of what the existing social and physical environment will allow. Obviously, we don't have the genetic
 18 capacity to fly by flapping our arms, and only the most courageous and creative or the most disturbed among us
 19 try to do things prohibited by law or social norms.

20 We make some changes volitionally; others (mainly physical changes) are carried out automatically; and some
 21 come about in relation to external influences, which may be random. Any of these changes may improve our
 22 functioning and the quality of our lives, or they may not. Some of them, even the volitional ones, may actually
 23 harm us. There's almost no way to accurately predict the outcome of change, regardless of how it is initiated. FL
 24 is primarily concerned with the process of volitional change, which refers to the behavioral changes we make by
 25 decision and implement over time, at least partly in awareness.

26 **Many people mistakenly believe that we can't control or even effectively influence our own changes.** At the
 27 same time, many of us hold the equally mistaken belief that other people are able to control us and make changes
 28 in us, possibly doing us damage. To make matters still worse, we usually assume that the only defense we have
 29 against other people controlling us is trying our best to control them. By this incredibly illogical logic, we are able
 30 to believe that if we play our cards right and develop enough cunning, status, and manipulative skill, we can have
 31 great influence over other people, but little or none over ourselves.

32 If we do think that we have some influence with ourselves and that we can teach ourselves to do better than we
 33 do, there is a tendency to use self-punishment as the learning method of choice. Since we know our own weak
 34 spots well, we know how to punish ourselves harshly. This prospect is so unpleasant that we tend to refuse to look
 35 at ourselves critically and try to avoid the whole learning process. Often it seems preferable to ignore our own
 36 experience so that we can feel justified in blaming and punishing someone else instead. People need to be
 37 constantly reminded that they can eliminate self-punishment without avoiding self-knowledge.

38 There's some truth to the idea that we can be changed without our consent, if it's also without our awareness. We
 39 allow and even assist others to shape us by choosing not to know that it's happening when it happens. In fact, we
 40 often give our consent and even our assistance without the knowledge or the awareness that we're doing either.

41 Sometimes we are consciously aware of deciding to turn over control of our will and our lives for promised
 42 rewards that may or may not be actualized. At other times, we surrender to whatever authority exists in a vain
 43 attempt to be rid of the responsibility that comes with knowing that we create our own action or inaction in
 44 response to whatever we encounter. Therefore, we never need to know that authorship of our own experience of
 45 the events of our lives is our inescapable birthright.

46 Sometimes changes come about because we make poor choices in full awareness, but then think that they were
 47 coerced. For example, if we choose to work two jobs at the expense of our health and pleasure, we'll tend to feel
 48 we were forced to do this in order to acquire luxuries or status that we believe are indispensable, although of
 49 course they never were.

50 Most of the time, we make it possible for others to change us by trying to change them. For example, we may
 51 desperately want to influence other people to approve of our behavior, and so we twist ourselves into whatever
 52 shapes we think will get that approval from them.

1 **Many of our changes are ongoingly influenced by our seemingly urgent need for fixed and highly favorable**
2 **self-images, which we usually want recognized by almost everyone.** This important picture of who we are and
3 what we can and can't expect tends to be deeply rooted in the approval and disapproval -- the regard or disregard -
4 - of others. Our good and bad feelings really are too determined by other peoples' assessments or judgements of
5 us, and most of us are constantly trying to adjust our behavior in relation to these positive and negative
6 reinforcers. Much of the time, we feel controlled by a constant need for recognition and approval, and therefore
7 assume that we must control how others view us if we can. Indeed, most of us spend a great deal of energy, and
8 make many automatic, badly thought-out personal adaptations, in the process of trying and failing to do that.

9 These control issues can create ongoing distress tensions that are hard to live with. Therefore, they are often
10 coupled with powerful longings to believe in something or someone enough to enable us to finally relax, conform
11 without question, and just obey. For many people, the only available options seem to be to give in and be
12 controlled; or try to become the controller; or just maintain a safe distance from most people. Trying to do all
13 three in perpetual conflict is not uncommon. (See Chapter __ -- Control).

14 **B. NON-VOLITIONAL PHYSICAL CHANGES**

15 In order to better understand the volitional changes that are FL's primary focus, it may be useful to briefly
16 describe the non-volitional changes that happen all the time. The physical adjustments that we undergo constantly
17 are not volitional and don't need to be. These changes are mostly automatic, internally determined, and largely not
18 in awareness. Feelings of pleasure or pain are usually present to let us know that things are going well or badly.
19 This works out well because most long and short term physical adjustments and changes happen more effectively
20 and much more efficiently out of our conscious control, at least until something goes wrong.

21 For example, energy rises and falls, our blood pressure, heart rate, blood sugar levels and all of our body systems
22 adjust automatically to our physiological variances, environmental changes, and behavioral decisions. Everything
23 in our bodies changes gradually but substantially, as we grow, mature, age, and decline. Our immune systems deal
24 with trauma or infection whenever necessary, sometimes mistakenly, but usually well.

25 In fact, most of the time we don't even try to intervene much in our own physical functioning until pain,
26 malfunction, or the perception of impending danger tells us that something has gone wrong and needs our
27 conscious attention. At such times, we might become motivated to act to protect ourselves, to prevent or correct
28 problems, and if necessary to seek help.

29 Often, the dangers we perceive are of our own making. The malfunctions we experience might be more
30 psychological than physiological, although some physical difficulty or damage is always at least part of the
31 picture. Anxiety, depression, rages, and other feelings manifest in physical symptoms that let us know that
32 something is wrong in our emotional life. When psychological problems impel us to intervene, it's not unusual to
33 hurt our own recovery more than we help it. For the most part, when we are conflicted and the balance is in favor
34 of wanting to get sick, we do, and when it is in favor of not wanting to get well, we don't. The reverse is just as
35 true. We can help our immune systems keep us healthy and cure many of our illnesses if we know that we can,
36 and want to more than we don't want to. Sometimes the best thing we can do is to limit our interference with our
37 automatic internal process while we reexamine and repair our damaged emotional coping mechanisms.

38 **C. NON-VOLITIONAL BEHAVIORAL CHANGES**

39 Some behavioral changes, like physical changes, are also mainly automatic, sometimes desirably and sometimes
40 not. Within broad genetic parameters, any form of behavioral change is ultimately shaped by intentional or
41 accidental rewards and punishments. As noted above, these pleasure/pain reinforcers of change appear most
42 frequently in the form of real or imagined approval and disapproval.

43 "Volitional," as previously defined, refers to decisions made and implemented at least partly in awareness, with or
44 without external influence. "Non-volitional" refers to any action, change, or learning in which either the decision
45 or the implementation process, or both, are not in awareness. If there's little resistance to either volitional or non-
46 volitional decisions, very little awareness is necessary for them to be successfully implemented.

47 **Because non-volitional changes are made without our conscious decision or input, they are particularly**
48 **prone to outside influences.** Some of these external influences are intentional. "Intentional," as we use the term
49 here, generally refers to influences that are attempting to accomplish a particular result, usually to some extent in
50 awareness, or very close to awareness.

51 Another factor in non-volitional change is unintentional and sometimes random external influence.
52 "Unintentional" influences are not intended to directly impact our own or other people's thoughts or behaviors.
53 Included in this category are "random" influences, which are human or environmental changes that come together
54 by chance and are beyond anyone's control until after the event has occurred. When unintentional events happen
55 repetitively and are undesirable, it is possible to devise means of preventing their reoccurrence.

- 1 The third way that non-volitional decisions are made and implemented is the result of internal influence, with
- 2 little or no awareness of the process involved or often of the changes that result.

TYPES OF INFLUENCES ON ONE'S IDEATIONAL AND BEHAVIORAL CHANGES	
External & Intentional -- Another person consciously tries to influence you (E.g. Your spouse tries to convince you to give up eating meat for health reasons).	External & Unintentional -- Another person influences you without planning to, or the environment influences you. (E.g. A peer dies during a bypass operation, or the price of meat goes up, both of which influence you to cut back on eating meat).
Internal & Intentional (VOLITIONAL) -- You consciously decide to make a change and then carry it out. (E.g. You decide to lose weight, and so change your diet and eliminate fatty foods such as meat).	Internal & Unintentional -- You make a change without the conscious intention to do so (E.g. You lose your taste for meat as you grow older).

3

4 **Most intentional external influences over our behavior are relatively non-threatening and easily identified.**

5 For example, teachers use grades and other rewards to influence their students' learning habits and performance.
 6 Employers give raises and other incentives to change and control their employees' productivity and perhaps their
 7 work habits. The deliberate influence of religions is obvious and considered beneficial by many people, or at least
 8 well intentioned. Friends, and of course parents or mates, and even our children usually intentionally try to
 9 influence our behavior, and sometimes our personalities. Any of these influences may be more or less favorably
 10 received. For example, often children are able to condition their parents because they control the reinforcers of
 11 pleasure and pain that create behavioral conditioning. From the very beginning of life, infants teach their parents
 12 to respond to their needs by the ways in which they cry. Most parents learn early to distinguish between cries of
 13 pain, fatigue, or desire for attention. When the parents respond, infants reward them with their happiness. If they
 14 don't respond, the baby's frustration and mounting unhappiness probably feels punishing. Perhaps some children
 15 eventually become conscious of their intention to be manipulative or to "train" their caregivers. The extent to
 16 which they succeed depends on the skill of the children and the disposition of the parents involved.

17 Often artists, entertainers, the media, politicians, and other representatives of the prevailing culture more or less
 18 directly intend to shape the ways that large numbers think, feel, and behave. High status positions may endow the
 19 people who occupy those positions with influence that is sometimes inappropriate. These people, in turn, may or
 20 may not choose to use this influence, with either good or bad consequences (by whatever criteria of "good" and
 21 "bad" prevail at the time). To a lesser extent, anybody in authority may have enormous intentional or even
 22 unintentional impact on the activities and changes of the individuals in their charge.

23 **Most of the influences we are subject to are not consciously intentional, although of course everyone**
 24 **involved might have intentions that they're not aware of.** These influences are not considered volitional
 25 because the direction of the changes, and the replacement behaviors that come about, are not part of anyone's
 26 conscious decisions or implementation plans. They happen because of the way the circumstances that impact us
 27 come together, which includes the fact that our conscious choices and actions have by-products that we do not
 28 intend.

29 For example, suppose a woman decides to divorce her husband. She may not have any desire to change or even
 30 influence her husband's personality, ideas, or individual behaviors in making this move. Nevertheless, even if she
 31 made no conscious decisions in the matter, her husband probably will change, not only the way he feels about her
 32 and women like her, but also the way he feels about himself and about trust, love, or relationship in general.
 33 Eventually, most of his ideational and future behavioral patterns will be influenced to some extent, even though
 34 neither he nor his wife had the intention to create such changes, or if they did they were not aware of them.

35 However, if the woman was caught up in a powerful punitive rage, as frequently happens, perhaps she did want to
 36 punish her husband by inflicting as much suffering on him as possible. This happens as often as it does because
 37 Ex-loved ones do tend to want to assign blame for the failure of relationship. In the process, they often encourage
 38 each other to form very negative self-images in the wake of their departure. It is very important that intentions
 39 such as these be brought to awareness so that the conflicts involved can be resolved more effectively. If such bad
 40 experiences are successfully worked through, it's possible for them to become a valuable source of new learning.
 41 In the result, people divorcing might become friends instead of life-long enemies, which is particularly important
 42 when children are involved. These are the experiences that can help us create either terrible unhappiness or an
 43 intentional life, in which rationally positive decisions about one's own future behavior can become an option.

44 Other examples of changes that result from mainly unintentional influences are the largely automatic adaptations
 45 most of us make when we encounter cultural and other changes in the environment. When very little fear or
 46 resistance is present, Such non-volitional changes happen relatively easily without thinking much about it.
 47 Adjustments to a new job, a new neighborhood, a new marriage, or a new baby can cause us to make positive or

1 negative largely non-volitional changes in the way we do things and the way we live our lives with very few
2 conscious decisions involved for anyone, until something goes wrong. At that point, we might need to begin to
3 think about making some volitional changes. For example, we might volitionally decide to study the language or
4 learn how to conform more easily to new social norms that are giving us difficulty, or we might discover conflicts
5 that are getting in the way of our ability to make good adaptations. When these things happen in awareness and in
6 our control, we are able to make some conscious choices about them.

7 The kinds of non-volitional changes mentioned above might lead an individual to make deep personality changes.
8 These changes often happen so gradually that the person making them doesn't even realize that it's happening,
9 although it might be obvious to others. Some people might experience clues, such as occasionally distressing
10 feelings of being controlled without their knowledge or consent. Many people will only be aware of some
11 superficial shifts they are making in adjusting to an unfamiliar and uncomfortable new situation. They won't be
12 aware that these shifts are related to deeper changes that they are making in their personalities.

13 As long as the kinds of non-volitional changes described above are positive and go well, there is no need for FL to
14 be concerned with them. FL is primarily a process that centers on working through resistance to changes that
15 people want to make but can't implement. It is usually not needed for changes that people want and are able to
16 make relatively easily, without much resistance.

17 **D. THE FL THEORY OF VOLITIONAL CHANGE OPTIONS**

18 The central concept is that every individual has the potential ability to volitionally influence the direction of their
19 own changes over time, if they want to more than they don't want to. Difficulties emerge because we are usually
20 very aware of wanting to make the change, but are usually much less aware of our fears, conflicts, and resistances
21 to doing so. Our possibilities for making behavior choices appear to be almost limitless. New learning can extend
22 to an enormous range of personal skill development. Of course, we also have the ability to make poor decisions
23 that result in largely destructive volitional changes that have influence that is just as extensive. For example,
24 making the decision to withdraw from most social interaction, and implementing that change at deep levels, will
25 probably have an extremely destructive effect on that person's personality and on their life.

26 Because we fear to make bad changes, we tend to make few conscious change choices and implement even fewer.
27 Therefore, the volitional aspects of the changes we do make tend to be minor and largely superficial. For example,
28 We often consciously choose to make small changes in our environment, our circumstances, or our relationships.
29 In each case, we are aware of making the decision and we are aware of implementing it, so it is a volitional
30 change. But even these small changes in the external aspects of our lives may lead to other much more significant
31 changes in our environment and in our personalities that we did not consciously initiate or anticipate. Similarly,
32 many small behavior changes made volitionally may lead to larger personality changes that are not planned or
33 intended. We might decide to change our way of speaking or how we make love, and although these decisions are
34 made consciously and implemented with some awareness, the far-ranging ripple effects on the rest of our
35 personality usually are not consciously planned or intended.

36 Whether we set out to make a superficial change in our behavior or in our environment, or want to directly
37 influence our personality, the impact of the changes we make volitionally cannot be precisely predetermined.
38 Indeed, our deeper, volitional changes rarely turn out to look like we thought they would, and they never function
39 as we imagined. This is probably because a great deal of internal input that is never fully in awareness is always
40 involved in volitional change. Our whole history up to that point becomes part of the process of integrating new
41 ideas and new behaviors. Many adjustments have to be made to whatever new ways of doing things and whatever
42 new skills we acquire. Adjustments also have to be made to the impact our changes are making on the
43 environment and on interactions with others to whom we are related. Obviously, there are just too many unknown
44 variables for us to even begin to precisely control the outcome.

45 Nevertheless, our power to change volitionally is probably much greater than most of us ever realize. Although
46 we too rarely exercise the option to do so, we are able to volitionally initiate and implement our own conditioning,
47 de-conditioning, and re-conditioning. In fact, almost any impulse, desire, capability, or habituated pattern of
48 behaviors or beliefs can be volitionally modified, re-directed, replaced, or even reversed, if we know that we can
49 and want to more than we don't. We have the innate ability to design ourselves to be loving or aggressive, even
50 violent, or passive and submissive, if we choose. We can be noisy or quiet, thoughtful or impulsively thoughtless.
51 We can be attracted to pain and afraid of pleasure. We can decide to reproduce or not, or be celibate or not. We
52 can become anorexic and decide not to eat, or we can compulsively overeat. We can even decide not to survive at
53 all. Or, we can reverse all of these, if that's what we decide to do and if we do the work necessary to implement
54 those decisions.

55 Similarly, we have the ability to consciously influence our social world or to voluntarily obey whatever social
56 norms dominate our culture. Collectively, we have the ability to volitionally influence the shape of our existing
57 social units and, to some extent, that of our physical environment as well. Small groups of friends and family
58 inevitably influence each other whether they are thinking about it or not. Exercising small-group influence can be

1 consciously volitional or it will be non-volitional and either random or dominated by the existing power structure.
2 The difference is determined by our relative awareness or unawareness of social influence, and our conscious
3 willingness to intervene.

4 For example, we can individually or collectively choose to cooperate in initiating and implementing social
5 changes in our small groups or we can automatically act to keep things the way they have been. We can agree to
6 pass many laws and make them very difficult to change, or we can build a fluid change system into the
7 management of our lives or that of our groups. Together, we can solve the problems that come up or we can
8 competitively jockey to establish whose to blame and administer punishment as seems appropriate and consider
9 that we've done something to resolve the issue.

10 With considerably more effort, small groups of like mind can join to collectively influence the larger society.
11 Individually, we can contribute to the growth of our small and large societies, or we can try to contract them. We
12 can make them violent or cooperative. We can make them work to everyone's satisfaction, and change them when
13 they don't work, or we can create them to be hierarchical at the expense of many, in the interests of a few. This
14 ability to implement change in ourselves and our environment by decision is particularly vital when the way
15 things are, and the automatic changes we and our social groups go through all the time, are effecting us adversely.

16 In other words, we are always either positively or negatively shaping both ourselves and the societies that shape
17 us. We can choose to be conscious of the influence we are having, or we can remain passive and oblivious.

18 However, choosing to embrace our ability to influence change is complex because almost every desire exists in
19 some conflict and may appear in its opposite. Furthermore, everything in our personality is related to everything
20 else. Therefore, every time you successfully correct one central mistake, resolve one conflict, or change one
21 problematic pattern of behaviors, many others change as well. Perhaps because volitional personality change is so
22 difficult and so far reaching, most of us choose to conduct most of our lives in accordance with the mistakes we
23 made early, based on the influence of the caregivers who socialized us. Although this tendency to hold onto the
24 past can result in very little volitional change, non-volitional change will continue unabated.

25 For the reasons mentioned above, and many more, fear of change in general is very strong, and resistance to
26 volitional change is even stronger. If bad things are going to happen, most of us would rather not be responsible
27 for the damage. When we know that we are functioning badly, but are very resistant to change, we tend to want to
28 keep things as they have been, even when things have been very painful. If we are to undertake the FL process,
29 we must first learn how to change our minds about change. We need to learn to accept the fact that change is often
30 more advantageous than it is dangerous, and that trying to maintain the status quo is potentially more destructive
31 than changing it.

32 Despite the ever-presence of resistance to change, We have the ability to make volitional changes in ourselves,
33 and collectively to make them in our large and small groups. Actualizing this ability depends on our acceptance of
34 the fact that we are extremely adaptive by our nature. Because we can adjust to almost anything, the truth is that
35 change is not as threatening as it often seems. It's also necessary to know that within reason, we can develop
36 almost any skill we need to make the change and learn to live with it. When we can't develop the skill ourselves,
37 we have the capability and usually the opportunity to join with others who can develop it and help us. Knowing
38 this makes it possible to maintain confidence in our ability to change and to cope with the consequences of the
39 changes we make, which are both prerequisite to maintaining the motivation required.

40 Instead of trying to resolve difficulty by changing the environment, other people, or surface behaviors, the FL
41 process encourages volitional changes in one's own personality. When individuals become able to rethink their
42 own ideation and reshape their own personality as they deem necessary, they also become better able to make
43 decisions together in the groups they live in, and to collectively create and recreate their own culture. Therefore, it
44 is the purpose of FL is to help individuals and groups learn how to implement volitional change, as part of their
45 day-to-day planning and problem solving. The goal is to learn how to do it more easily, more fluidly, and much
46 more enjoyably than is possible for most people.

47 **E. THE FL CHANGE PROCESS**

48 Implementing decisions to make necessary volitional changes takes time in which to acquire the new learning
49 skills required. Specifically, the required skills includes awareness and focus of attention; ability to accurately
50 disclose and receive disclosure; ability to think interactively and change one's mind when new information
51 warrants it; and ability to empathize, care, and love. The fact that the development of these skills is prerequisite
52 to successfully using the FL process may seem to pose a paradox, since obviously very few people have these
53 skills in place to any great extent when they begin. In fact, though, learning these skills interweaves constantly
54 with all of other behavioral targets pursued in FL. Each behavior changed through the process has the by-product
55 of increasing these skills, and each skill increase makes all the other changes more possible and more fluid. Both
56 processes are gradual and intended to continue throughout a lifetime of ongoing learning, change, and growth.

1 FL suggests that human capability for self-shaping and volitional change is innate, but like our capacity for
 2 language, it has to be developed. The behavioral skills required for the development of this change capability (that
 3 are mentioned above) are also potentially available to everyone, but it's necessary to learn how to access them.
 4 Once we have begun the work of actualizing the necessary skills, the change process itself can be relatively easy
 5 and very exciting, often even when resistance to the proposed change is high.

6 **The first learning is to welcome current information and new ideas and respond to what is heard.**

7 Interaction around current information provides new ways to think about old stuck problems. Resistance to
 8 hearing and seriously considering current information has to be dealt with repeatedly, whenever it appears. We
 9 need new ideas with which to rethink and eventually replace old rigid patterns of negative thoughts. Current
 10 information is a necessary ingredient for dealing with the constant fears generated by unresolved conflict,
 11 problems, prejudice, and negativity. Availability for current information and deeper understanding is usually
 12 blocked by entrenched, habituated ideas and thought patterns. Regardless of the quality of these ideas themselves,
 13 they are by their nature flawed, simply by virtue of being too rigid to consistently respond appropriately to the
 14 variances of current reality. Most of them have to be rethought and volitionally changed before the problematic
 15 behaviors under consideration can be replaced with more effective ways to think about current information.

16 Becoming aware of the conflicts involved and the feelings generated is an integral part of the process. These
 17 feelings might be very distressing, but it's not possible to change them by command. However, it is always
 18 possible to change one's mind, and when minds change, feelings also change.

19 For example, suppose that a man tells his girlfriend that his doctor said he might have a cancerous tumor. . The
 20 thought that there is imminent threat of loss will probably create feelings of sadness, fear, and perhaps anxiety in
 21 her. All the physical reactions generated by those feelings will be present. If the woman finds out that the tumor is
 22 benign, and that her boyfriend is not ill, she will probably feel relief and possibly joy. She might also get enraged
 23 at her boyfriend (or perhaps his doctor), feeling that the danger was overstated. But she will probably no longer
 24 feel sad. If she still feels fear, it might now be related to her potentially aggressive feelings toward her boyfriend
 25 or his doctor. The feelings of fear that she experienced about his potential illness could not simply be commanded
 26 away, but they changed automatically when the new information caused her thoughts about the situation to
 27 change. Similarly, the fear she feels of her own rage at her boyfriend or his doctor will only change as she
 28 becomes more aware of the many feelings and thoughts involved, and decides what to do about them.

29 Unfortunately, most of the mistaken perceptions that FL deals with are not as easy to correct as this -- the "paper
 30 tigers" that most of us fear are elusive, and simply correcting a mistake doesn't necessarily convince us that they
 31 aren't imminent. In our example, perhaps the prospect of the death of the beloved created reactions strong enough
 32 to reawaken fears of deep love relationship and loss that the woman carried from the past.

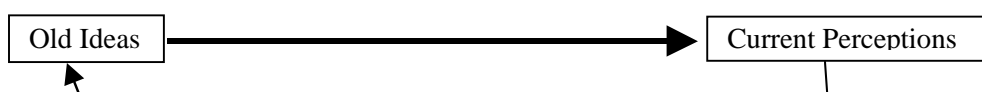
33 **The process by which perceptions and thoughts become feelings, actions, and behaviors is a complicated**

34 **one.** It helps to have some understanding about how they might work, if we want to change the patterns involved.
 35 Thoughts start with perceptions of an event. You might see or hear something, or somebody might tell you
 36 something about which you might then form a picture (i.e. you get the report that your lover may have cancer).
 37 The thoughts that follow are the meanings assigned to perception (i.e. the lover in question is very dear to you and
 38 cancer is very dangerous). Assumptions are the interpretations you make of that meaning (i.e. my lover is
 39 unusually fragile, probably likely to succumb to cancer, and not likely to survive.). Conclusions are drawn from
 40 those assumptions (i.e. my lover will probably die). Expectations are what you expect will happen based on your
 41 conclusions (i.e. this is going to be horrible -- unless I do something, I will lose a person I can't live without. I am
 42 impotent to help, and unable to cope with the loss). (See Chapter ___ on Thought)

43 Feelings are the combined physical sensations and the myriad of resulting thoughts and images that come up in
 44 response to all of the above. In the example above, these would obviously include fear or panic, and possibly
 45 hysteria. In contrast, some people might become numb and feel nothing. Automatic fight / flight / freeze /
 46 submission or reasoned responses will generate and create the next actions. New thoughts will proliferate in
 47 similar chains of response.

48 Everything described above, from perception to action, takes place in a split second, simultaneously with many
 49 other such sequences. Most of the time very little of this takes place in awareness. Only the feelings involved are
 50 usually experienced in consciousness.

51 The problem is that perceptions tend to be distorted. Distorted reality perception comes about in many ways, but



Old ideas heavily influence how we perceive reality -- At the same time,
 current perceptions mostly reinforce old ideas and rarely inform or
 change them

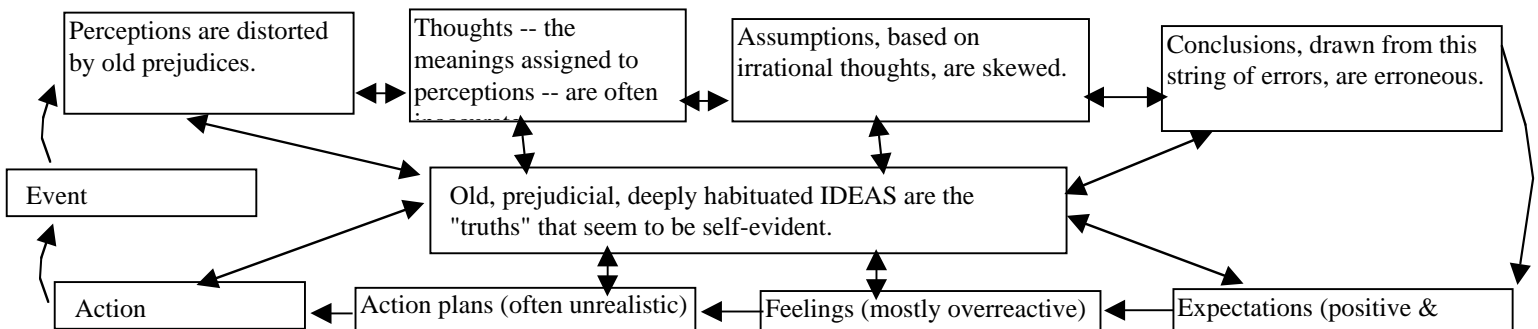
52 principally as a result of whatever prejudices we hold onto and allow to dominate our thought process at the time.

1 For example, the woman discussed above might have unrealistically prejudicial confidence in the certainty of any
 2 doctor's diagnostic speculations. Unfortunately, even when we do accept new information and think we've
 3 changed our minds, we often maintain an emotional commitment to old convictions for quite a long time. The
 4 same woman might have previously lost other loved ones to cancer, so as soon as she hears the word she assumes
 5 the worst, despite the fact that new information might tell her than many forms of cancer are now curable. In the
 6 end, current perceptions do not usually impact old ideas quickly or very strongly, but old ideas automatically and
 7 very powerfully influence and shape current perceptions. As a result, we're more likely to see what we expect to
 8 see than what is really there. The process is circular. Perceptual distortions, and the unrealistic expectations they
 9 create and are created by, produce erroneous assumptions. Of course, the conclusions drawn from distorted
 10 perceptions and mistaken assumptions cannot be accurate except by accident. Inaccurate conclusions, in turn,
 11 inevitably create still more unrealistic expectations that tend to be either negatively or positively exaggerated.
 12 These are the false expectations that commonly create the overreactive feelings that generate problematic action.
 13 In addition, Unrealistic overreactions, and the actions they generate, are likely to create still more fear and new
 14 dangers of their own. These distorted expectations and exaggerated feelings create further perceptual distortions.
 15 Taken together, all of the above reinforce whatever habituated maladaptive thought patterns are involved at the
 16 time. All of it might improve if we rethought and changed the prejudiced and flawed thinking that started the
 17 whole unfortunate chain of events.

18 For example, you might mistakenly perceive that people who wear red clothing are often inclined to hurt you.
 19 Perhaps you rationalize this belief with the notion that people who wear red are flamboyant ostentatious attention
 20 grabbers with bad taste. Therefore, the unreasonable reasoning that follows suggests that they are probably also
 21 rivalrous and hostile towards you or others who wear more conservative colors. (At deeper levels, Your fear
 22 might stem from the fact that you associate the color red to intense emotion, which frightens you) Because of this
 23 kind of prejudicial process, You will probably tend to perceive people who wear red as hostile troublemakers and
 24 treat them accordingly. The interactions that follow will probably reflect and validate those perceptions and
 25 responses. You might generate assumptions, conclusions, and expectations that support your perceptual
 26 distortions about those specific people and others like them. All of this irrationality will be accompanied by
 27 feelings of threat in relation to them. Your behavior will obviously be designed to react to those imagined
 28 dangers. In the process, you will inevitably relate to red-clothed people in ways that might stimulate feelings of
 29 threat in them. Their reactions will then tend to reinforce your original fears, setting up a self-fulfilling prophecy.
 30 Your ability to change any of your prejudicial attitudes or the problematic behaviors that follow from them will be
 31 undermined by the now somewhat accurate perception that they are hostile towards you.

32 To review, the sequence in which problematic behaviors are generated usually moves in the following
 33 progression:

- 34 1. We perceive something. perceptions are often distorted by old prejudices, values, or social norms;
- 35 2. We have thoughts that are necessarily based on the erroneous meanings we assign to these perceptions;
- 36 3. We make assumptions that are derived from these distortions. Assumptions tend to be clusters of skewed
 37 thoughts and erroneous meanings that support the original mistakes;
- 38 4. We draw conclusions from all of the above. Inevitably, these conclusions are as out of kilter as the
 39 information they are based on;
- 40 5. We form expectations. These tend to be exaggeratedly positive or negative.
- 41 6. The feelings generated are mainly overreactive.
- 42 7. We make action plans that are formulated on the basis of these chains of errors
- 43 8. The actions taken, as a result of all of the above often create self-fulfilling prophecies of danger that in turn
 44 further reinforce fears, old ideas, and new perceptual distortions, and create still more resistance to change.



45 Getting out of these circular behavioral traps requires that we rethink old ideas. As the figure above illustrates,
 46 this is the hub around which the malfunctioning wheel turns. Rethinking old ideas enables us to develop better
 47 reality perception and become much more available for the current information and new ideas that make volitional
 48 change possible.

1

2 **It is also pivotal to the FL process that participants learn how to give and receive feedback.** Early in the
3 process, The natural mechanism for receiving feedback of our problematic patterns of behavior in normal
4 interaction is brought to the surface. Learning to welcome the feedback of critical information is difficult, but
5 extremely necessary. The feedback referred to in FL is a literal report of relevant actions or events observed,
6 either by ourselves or others. Availability of direct feedback from others and opportunity to discuss their
7 interpretations of the behaviors we target for change improves our ability to selectively focus our attention and to
8 develop more accurate reality perception, and it enhances our awareness and understanding of ourselves and of
9 others. Sometimes motivation to receive and process feedback can be better maintained if we constantly reinforce
10 the realization that it is indispensable to making the volitional behavioral changes we need for a better life.

11 Our ability to interactively think about, discuss, and interpret the feedback we get is even more central to the
12 learning than the feedback itself. Interpretation is defined as the process of assigning meaning to the information
13 that is fed back to us. Becoming more aware of and interpreting our behaviors in all of the circumstances in which
14 they occur is the beginning of understanding and eventually changing what we do and how we do it. When
15 feelings of anxiety or self-punishment come up in relation to the feedback and interpretations we receive, part of
16 the process is learning to discuss and understand them, and learn how to let them go.

17 The interpretations exchanged help us to become increasingly aware of the impact of our behavior, both on
18 ourselves and on others. We are by our nature able to empathize with those we impact and care about the
19 consequences of those interactions. This makes it possible not just to witness, discuss, and understand their
20 experience, but to actually share it. At some level, consciously and not, we process all of this information,
21 however well or badly we do, and make decisions that determine our future. The FL assumption is that bringing
22 more of this experience into awareness and thinking about it with other people enables us to be less influenced by
23 old fearful ideation and to base more of our decisions on whatever current information and interpretations we are
24 able to gather and process.

25 **Disclosure, and receiving the disclosures of others, is essential to FL.** Becoming more consistently self-aware
26 requires disclosing more to other people and becoming more aware of their reactions. Hiding from others makes it
27 almost impossible to avoid hiding from ourselves as well. If we don't check out what we're doing as we're doing
28 it, we tend to form conflicting, inaccurate, largely exaggerated images, not only of how we are but of how we are
29 perceived. Also, reluctance to be seen or known makes it difficult to see or know others. We tend not to ask the
30 questions we don't want to be asked and to avoid the topics we don't want to think about. Yet, although so many
31 people fear to be seen or known, they often long for both.

32 The most common purpose of secrecy, usually called "privacy," is to prevent being seen as inadequate in some
33 way, being criticized, and ultimately being rejected. Ironically, aversion to disclosure makes intimacy or closeness
34 difficult, and people who want these things will tend to reject those who don't. In the result, the attempt to avoid
35 being rejected for what you disclose brings about being rejected for what you withhold. Yet, people tend to
36 remain secretive because getting rejected for what you've disclosed even once seems somehow more painful than
37 getting rejected for non-disclosure over and over again. Learning to take risks with disclosure responsibly, and to
38 profit in wisdom from mistakes, is an essential first step in becoming an effective problem solver and a competent
39 facilitator of one's own and other people's volitional changes.

40 **A life in which volitional change is avoided is in many ways a life half-lived.** The downside of avoiding risk
41 taking is that people don't learn how to make the necessary changes volitionally, and therefore they tend to go
42 through life actualizing only a small percentage of their potential ability to influence their own development and
43 personal growth, or that of their particular living and working groups. Self-limiting problematic behaviors are
44 reinforced and tend to get more entrenched over time. The negative changes that often take place automatically
45 proliferate, usually in such small increments that they go largely unnoticed.

46 In retrospect, it's often observable that one's mind has shrunken instead of expanded over the years. Feelings tend
47 to be more flat or negative than they were. For some people, rages or pain, inflicted and received, provide high
48 points of drama and excitement that are hard to let go of. In the face of attraction to these obviously self-
49 destructive events, even small risks can begin to seem frightening. However, we're usually most afraid of
50 ourselves and what we might do. In this context, new and therefore unpredictable experiences can seem just too
51 uncomfortable to undertake. Resistance becomes increasingly difficult to overcome.

52 Often, the shrinking of mental and emotional vision and function, which results over time, is mistakenly
53 considered to be an inevitable result of the aging process. FL theory suggests that this shrinking phenomenon, in
54 which negativity tends to find fertile ground, is probably more the result of rigid patterns of ideas, learned early
55 and never reconsidered, than it is of brain deterioration caused by aging. The longer we maintain and reinforce
56 these ideas, the smaller our minds tend to become, and this may explain why many people seem to lose their
57 cognitive and emotional range as they grow older. In fact, aging can just as easily bring the greater wisdom of
58 accumulated experience, as well as confidence, optimism, and enthusiasm. As people age they can learn to

1 manage the inevitable losses and minimize whatever pain is involved, while maintaining mature appreciation for
2 the good things still happening and yet to come. Increasing maturity can at least partially outbalance the inevitable
3 wear and tear inflicted by the years, if we keep translating our new experiences into new learning, change, and
4 growth. As we have discussed above, trying to prevent change only serves to eliminate our awareness of and
5 conscious involvement with our changes. We keep changing anyway, but usually not for the better.

6 The work required to deal with the behavior patterns that prematurely age us can be extremely demanding.
7 Resistance tends to grow over time, and the effort to overcome it and do what's required gets more difficult as
8 adjustments to whatever "is" get increasingly entrenched. We tend to get used to the symptoms we generate, no
9 matter how bad they are, and eventually they become part of our working systems. However, if we do decide to
10 begin the work of learning to understand and volitionally reshape our ways of being in the world, we can succeed
11 at any age.

12 Once undertaken, the effort is almost always very rewarding. Further, whenever it is undertaken, we develop
13 many of the valuable skills described above as a by-product of the process. Since the FL volitional change process
14 is designed to make us more aware of what we are changing, what we're changing to, and why, it gives us much
15 better control of our choices at every point. (See Section VI-C -- Steps in the FL process).

16 F. MOTIVATION AND RESISTANCE TO CHANGE

17 Although volitional change can be extremely valuable, some fear of it and varying degrees of resistance to
18 undertake it are almost universal. This is not, in itself, a problem. Resistance is a good and necessary ingredient of
19 the change process. Because we are capable of serious mistakes, resistance gives us time and incentive to
20 understand our choices better. Also, Resistance pushes us to keep the changes we have previously made intact,
21 and it prevents us from lightly succumbing to external influences without due consideration. Working out the
22 conflict between our desire to do things better, and our tendency to want to keep things as they are, has many
23 beneficial side effects, including forcing us to slow down long enough to think about how the changes we are
24 contemplating will impact all the dimensions of our lives.

25 Resistance is not always a major factor in volitional change. When the changes we contemplate are relatively
26 unconflicted and fears are minimal, resistance is low, motivation is usually high, and volitional changes can take
27 place and be integrated into the personality easily, almost effortlessly. For example, if there is little or no conflict,
28 a religious, philosophic, psychological, or even a political epiphany or insight can happen in a moment and, with
29 relatively little effort, they sometimes lead to major ideational and personality changes that last a lifetime.

30 But when motivation for volitional change is slow to achieve and very difficult to maintain, it is necessary to
31 identify and resolve the motivational conflicts and excessive resistances that exist. We need to know where the
32 fears, the conflicts, the mistakes, and the latent problems are. Exploring resistance reveals the flawed ideation that
33 underlies the problematic behaviors we want to target for change. Also, becoming sensitive to the resistances of
34 people with whom we interact keeps us more aware of them and of their issues, and makes us better able to
35 understand them in the varying dimensions of their personalities, moods, fears, and preferences. For these reasons
36 (and many more), learning how to recognize, understand, and overcome one's own, as well as other people's
37 resistances, is probably among the most important skills developed in the FL process.

38 Resistance can form in response to an infinite range of stimuli and desires. For example, exposure to new ideas
39 can trigger fears that we won't understand and will be exposed as stupid. Or perhaps we'll be misled or somehow
40 hurt. Similarly, thoughts about new ways of doing things trigger fears that we can't do it, can't do it right, or can't
41 cope with whatever consequences we expect. Desires to express ourselves are frequently met with fears that we'll
42 be misunderstood, criticized, or judged harshly and rejected. Also, we're often afraid that if we try to change
43 anything, we're likely to make the wrong choices and do ourselves more harm than good, or that the people close
44 to us won't be able to easily adjust to the changes we bring about.

45 **One of the most difficult forms of resistance is the mistaken belief that one's "natural" personality is in-**
46 **born or determined early and cannot significantly be altered.** If we try to redesign ourselves, we'll fail and just
47 become phony. We simply are who we are, and there's nothing to be done but adjust. This usually means that it's
48 better not to try to do anything we don't easily identify with doing. This tends to include most things we've never
49 done before. The tendency is to assume that we lack some required "natural" talent.

50 For example, we've all heard people say, "I'm just not creative." The statement is usually followed by expressions
51 of unwillingness to consider whatever action seems to require creativity. Clearly this is an attitude that is very
52 widespread and needs to be volitionally changed. With help, it usually can be. Unfortunately, creativity is
53 discouraged early in life except for the few that are regarded as "talented." In spite of this, there is a great deal of
54 evidence that all people are innately creative -- that this is one of our many universal capabilities. We all dream
55 every night, and the dream creates a highly imaginative drama that includes all the elements of theater. The play
56 of all children and many adults contain large elements of creativity. Some of us are lucky enough to have that

1 opportunity in our work and relationships. Creativity and problem solving are necessities that we are all capable
2 of, but few of us have the courage to acknowledge or employ.

3 **Another form of resistance to change is the belief that making basic changes in our personalities is**
4 **somehow wrong.** Many people firmly believe that it's immoral to try to make basic changes in themselves. A
5 popular idea in our culture is that personal integrity and general well-being demand pride in whatever we already
6 are or think we are. The idea is that we need a fixed favorable self-image that expresses an equally fixed as well
7 as more or less permanent "God-given" identity, that solidifies and stops changing once we achieve maturity,
8 whenever that is. If that identity is one that we don't approve of, the automatic conclusion tends to be that our best
9 bet is to privately adjust as well as we can and publicly hide this disapproved identity. In the process, many of us
10 try desperately to maintain whatever favorable fixed public image seems possible. It's not unusual to practice
11 denial liberally and try to hide whatever we consider our shortcomings, even from ourselves.

12 **In contrast, FL holds that our identities are not static and our images of ourselves should fluidly reflect our**
13 **changing reality as appropriate.** Identity is defined by FL as the aspects of the self that are relevant in specific
14 circumstances at particular points in time. Self is shaped by the experiences we have had and are having.
15 Therefore, both identity and self are constantly evolving.

16 In addition to believing that volitional change is both possible and desirable, it is also necessary to have very
17 strong clear motivation for both the desired change and for engaging in the process necessary to bring it about.
18 This is particularly true when fears and pressures proliferate and resistance is high.

19 To be consistently effective, motivation requires that desire for specific outcomes be stronger than the fear of
20 them. To accomplish this, it's necessary to know clearly what you want to change and why you want to change it.
21 Motivation also requires knowing what replacement behaviors and skills you want to develop, although your
22 choices will usually shift frequently in different circumstances. For the change to happen, the fears experienced
23 have to be understood in many different circumstances and laid to rest each time they come up.

24 Some work is required in order to develop the relatively unconflicted motivation needed to deal with the problems
25 related to change. This work begins by helping people to determine which of their habituated patterns of thought
26 and behavior are causing their problems, creating their symptoms, effecting their relationships adversely, and
27 making them unhappy. Once the relevant issues are identified, and the fears as well as the other dynamics
28 involved are somewhat understood, people are encouraged to reconsider and possibly decide to change the
29 ideational and behavioral choices they established in the past and are living with badly in the present. It's also
30 often necessary to resolve whatever internal conflicts are involved.

31 One of the most difficult aspects of establishing and maintaining motivation for the volitional change process is
32 remaining clear about what we want to change and acquiring the ability to make pictures of what we want to
33 change to. We need images of what new ways of being and behaving might look like, and a sense of how they
34 will feel. It's also important to have an ongoing sense of how the changes we make might be received by
35 significant others, with what impact on them, and what the outcome might be for everyone concerned. (See
36 Section V, Steps in the FL process)

37 Motivation also requires reasonable confidence in one's ability to succeed at making the desired changes. It's also
38 necessary to consistently maintain confidence that one will be able to cope with the consequences of either
39 succeeding or failing. If you think that you haven't got what it takes to succeed; or if you are overconfident, in
40 denial, and believe that you can't fail; or if you fear that you can't adjust to the changes that will ensue from either
41 the failure or the success of whatever action you take, you probably will find good reasons not to try. At every
42 step in the process, it is necessary for the changes planned to be known and wanted more than they are not
43 wanted.

44 **G. CONFLICT AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION ARE REQUIREMENTS FOR** 45 **VOLITIONAL CHANGE**

46 Interpersonal conflicts, like motivational conflicts, are not in themselves damaging. In fact, the fact that conflict
47 once existed can be highly beneficial once it is resolved. Resolution of conflict that results in synthesis of
48 opposing thoughts or interests can form the dialectic that underlies new learning, volitional change, and personal
49 or interpersonal growth. If the resolution arrived at calls for adjustment, compromise, or even amicable separation
50 of the parties involved, the changes that result will usually release some of the energy tied up in unresolved
51 conflict, bring about new possibilities, and improve the quality of life for everyone concerned.

52 In a very real sense, conflict is the basis for volitional change and the source of all movement and all new
53 development. It represents the basic thesis and antithesis from which new synthesis can evolve. Much of our
54 movement involves the opposition of opposites. Many of our physical systems work on this principle. Muscles
55 move when they extend and contract. The sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems function in this kind

1 of opposing and yet complementary fashion. New ideas form out of confrontation with opposing concepts, and
2 male and female come together to produce new life.

3 Most of the difficulties we encounter within and between people or social units, as well as the many troubles we
4 create in our environments, are not the result of conflicts, but of our failure to effectively resolve them.

5 Hidden conflicts of all kinds invariably surface during the FL process. Some of them are largely internal,
6 involving opposing ideas, desires, and fears within an individual. Often old conditioned ideation rises to strongly
7 oppose more current but equally fervently held beliefs. Conflicts between individuals or groups might be based on
8 incompatibilities and conflicting needs, interests, ideas, or temperaments, but more often it's the result of
9 misunderstanding, misinformation, or just the lack of necessary current information. Status and rivalry issues of
10 all kinds tend to result more from internal pressures, derived from old ideas about comparative excellence and
11 seemingly urgent image needs, than they do from real problems between the people involved. Resolving these
12 issues and the conflicts they generate usually requires a good deal of facilitated dialogue.

13 The process of engaging in facilitated dialogue undertaken in the interests of resolving conflicts or negotiating
14 acceptable compromises brings about many desirable side effects. Every effective dialogue creates greater
15 awareness of one's own ideas and needs, as well as those of others. Unfortunately, if dialogue is not effective or
16 not possible, conflict will probably not be resolved and may be exacerbated. Aggression between the conflicted
17 parties or against oneself may result. But even limited discussion that discloses some of the suppressed hostility
18 involved might lead to lessening of misunderstanding and some lowering of rage. This might be sufficient to
19 facilitate reasonable adjustment or satisfactory compromise, if not full synthesis of the opposing ideas, and the
20 situation is likely to be at least somewhat improved. If some attempt is made to understand whatever points of
21 view are presented, probably more of the issues will be brought to awareness so that they can be dealt with more
22 effectively than they would be if they were completely suppressed. (A fuller description of the process of conflict
23 resolution and the process of facilitated dialogue appears in Section VI -- Steps in the FL process.)