Where Did I Leave Myself?

You are talking to someone, and at first you know what you think about the situation. Then the other person reacts. Perhaps they disagree, become disappointed or seem uncomfortable with what you have said. You begin to reconsider your words, explain yourself or adjust what you were about to say. By the time the conversation moves on, you may find yourself agreeing to something you were unsure about or no longer expressing what mattered to you.

Bring to mind a particular conversation in which something like this happened. Return to the point at which your response began to change. Follow the conversation in the order in which it unfolded. What had you been thinking or feeling just before the other person reacted? What did you notice in yourself when you saw or heard their response? At what point did their reaction begin to carry more weight in your next decision than your own perception of the situation?

Stay with that moment. You may remember changing a word before you spoke, withholding something you wanted to say or beginning to explain yourself even though nobody had asked you to. Perhaps you agreed while something in you remained uncertain. Look at what you actually did and how your attention shifted during the encounter. This can help you recognise the point at which you began to organise your response around the other person.

Now return to what you had perceived before that shift. What had you wanted to say? What had you noticed about the situation? Was there something you wanted to express or a decision you were already leaning towards? Give your own perception room to be present again. You can examine it and change your mind when you have a reason to do so. What matters here is recognising whether you reconsidered something because you saw it differently, or whether you began to doubt yourself because of how the other person responded.

Notice what happens in your body as you recall the moment when you changed your response. You might recognise tension, an impulse to speak quickly or a sense that you need to resolve the other person's discomfort. These sensations can help you identify what was happening in you at that point. Their meaning depends on the situation and your own experience, so allow yourself to find out what they tell you rather than deciding in advance what they mean.

Consider what you were trying to achieve by adjusting yourself in that moment. Perhaps you wanted to avoid an argument, preserve the connection or make sure that the other person understood you. Perhaps something else was important to you. Look at what your adjustment actually accomplished and what it meant for your own position in the conversation. You may recognise that you had a reason for responding as you did, while also seeing that your own perception no longer had the place you wanted it to have.

Bring the same situation back into view and consider what you can decide for yourself now. You may still care about the other person's reaction, and you may want to take what they say into account. You can listen, reconsider your position and respond to what you learn. At the same time, you can allow your own perception to remain part of the decision. What would you want to express or decide if you gave that perception the consideration it deserves? What are you willing to reconsider, and what do you currently have reason to stand by?

Return to the conversation and put your own response into words as you would express it today. It may be a sentence you would say differently, a decision you would communicate more clearly or a point you would leave open until you had considered it properly. Notice what happens in you as you imagine expressing it. If the words feel difficult to find, you can write them down or give the situation a simple visual form that helps you see your own position within it.

The next time you notice yourself adjusting to another person's reaction, you can use that moment to return to your own perception before deciding how to respond. You remain free to change your mind, take another person's perspective seriously or decide that something you initially wanted no longer fits. Your own judgement can be part of that process. You do not have to lose sight of it in order to remain in contact with someone else.