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## (6) Lebensohl Basics: *Simple-sohl*

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Level: Intermediate

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### General Introduction

*Lebensohl* is a very useful convention that is used when the opponents interfere over our 1N opening. *Lebensohl* is also a very large convention and many players find it complicated and overwhelming (it has many places where it can be used and many details for players to remember.) The purpose of this lesson is to help you understand the development of *Lebensohl* and the ideas behind it - we'll avoid discussions of the technical details or any other sophisticated approaches and stick to the basic ideas that led to the invention of *Lebensohl*. These fundamental ideas and their most basic implementation I call *Simple-sohl*. *Simplesohl* is a basic agreement that will help you deal with the opponents competing in your 1N auctions!

### Opening 1N

When we open the bidding with 1N our partnership has a good idea of how to bid and effectively describe our hands. In standard Notrump bidding when partner opens 1N our tools are generally Stayman and Transfers. We also use 2N to invite partner to game - "invitational with 8-9 HCP" (or something similar if we play 4-suited transfers.)

When the opponents interfere in the bidding, however, it makes our life much more difficult. In some of these cases we must change our general approach to bidding...

### Interference with Systems On

*Vs. Double*

When the opponents double our 1N opening, we ignore the double and play systems on (as if the opponents had not interfered.)

*Note: We generally play the same methods whether the opponents' double is conventional or penalty. One exception is that when the opponents' double is penalty we change the meaning of redouble to "rescue;" if the opponents' double is conventional we play that redouble is "value showing."*



### *Vs. 2♣ Interference*

When the opponents interfere with 2♣, we play Double as Stayman (stolen bid) and otherwise we play systems on (as if the opponents had not interfered.)

### **Interference with Systems Off: *Simplesohl* Introduced**

#### *Vs. 2♦-2♠ Interference*

When the opponents interfere at the 2-Level (other than 2♣), they take away our standard bidding structure and we have to give up Stayman and Transfers and develop a new bidding system (methodology.)

The main advantage of Transfers is that they allow us to show multiple hand types using the same bid. When we transfer, we could have a minimum hand interested only in a partscore, and invitational hand, a game-forcing hand, or a hand interested in slam. Consider these hands:

♠ xx ♥QJxxx ♦xxx ♣xxx  
♠ Ax ♥QJxxx ♦Jxx ♣xxx  
♠ Ax ♥QJxxx ♦Jxx ♣Axx

With all three hands you start with the same bid - 2♦; you will then clear up which kind of hand you have with your next bid (Pass, 2N, 3N in these cases.)

### **Hand Types**

When the opponents interfere in the bidding we generally have three hand-types that we want to describe to partner:

- Competitive Hands – usually 6-8 pts with a long suit,
- Invitational Hands,
- Game Forcing Hands.

In an effort to find a new bidding approach that will allow us to describe all of these hand types we begin by adopting a few general principles:

- 2-Level Bids are natural and competitive (non-forcing,)
- 3-Level Bids are natural and game forcing (jumps or non-jumps,)
- Cuebid is Game Forcing and “Stayman-like” (often looking for 4-4 Major suit fit.)

These agreements take care of many of the hands we might hold, but there are still some hands that we need to figure out how to handle:

- Invitational Balanced Hands,
- Competitive Hands with a Suit we cannot bid at the 2-Level,
- Invitational Hands with a 5-card Major that we can show at the 2-Level



## Defining Double

The first thing that we recognize when we start to consider our options is that we have a new call available to us – Double. We use Double to be “card showing.” That means we have a relatively balanced hand with invitational (or better) values and we have no other good bid available to us.

*Note: Double is our fall-back plan. It shows a hand that “wants to take action” but doesn’t know what other action to take. This meaning for Double will be a running theme and is the modern approach to the meaning of Double.*

## **Redefining 2N: *Simplesohl* Relay**

Having agreed to this meaning of double (8+ HCP and relatively balanced), then we no longer need a natural and invitational 2N bid. This frees 2N up to be used as a conventional bid (called *Lebensohl*.) We use 2N as a way to distinguish between forcing and non-forcing bids at the 3-level.

Here is how *Simple-sohl* works...

We define 2N to be a *relay* to 3♣. That means that when Responder bids 2N (in competition) the 1N opener must bid 3♣. This 2N bid means nothing, it just says to partner “I’m going to bid something at the 3-level partner – you bid 3♣, then I’ll tell you what is going on...” This gives us two ways to make all of our bids at the three-level: we can bid them directly (game-forcing), or we can go through the 2N relay first (competitive.)

### *Basic Example*

In the example below we see how to use this 2N relay to distinguish between a competitive and a game forcing hand.

1N (2♥) 3♦                      5+c♦ suit and GF values (10+ HCP)  
1N (2♥) 2N\*-3♣\*-3♦        5+c♦ suit and competitive values (6-8 HCP)

This may all seem a bit strange and overwhelming, but with a little practice it will seem much more natural to you... Just remember “I use 2N to compete in the bidding and I double with the invitational balanced hand” (the hand with which you used to bid 2N.)

*Note: Once you master this idea and feel comfortable with this new use of 2N you will see that there are many other uses of this kind of “relay.” We will talk more about this when we discuss the complete *Lebensohl* convention.*

### *More Examples*

1N (2♥) 2♠                      Competitive, 5+c♠, 6-7 HCP (non-forcing)  
1N (2♥) 2N\*-3♣\*-3♠        Invitational, 5+c♠, 8-9 HCP (non-forcing)  
1N (2♥) 3♠                      Game Forcing, 5+c♠, 10+ HCP



## Conclusion

My advice is to talk to your partner about *Simplesohl*. You don't have to learn all of the complexities of Lebensohl in order to gain many of the advantages of the convention. "2N is a relay to 3♣ that we use to compete in the bidding and double is card showing – balanced invitational+." That is a pretty easy conversation to have with your partner and can help solve a lot of difficult bidding problems – give it a try!