

SOME SUGGESTIONS ON THE NATURE OF DIALOGUE

Dialogue starts from willingness to be tentative about what you know.

The focus of dialogue is on “what is” rather than on ideas and opinions.

Dialogue is letting the issue unfold in affection and mutual respect.

When a reaction arises, neither suppress it nor defend it, but stay with it and let it unfold in the mind and in the group, keeping it constantly available for observation and questioning.

Dialogue is “being together” and “seeing together” in an unfolding relationship.

Dialogue is not "agreeing or disagreeing" nor is it convincing or arguing.

DIALOGUE PROCESS

Dialogue is a way to create a new culture of meaning. It involves new habits of being with a group, and of being with your self.

The purpose of dialogue is to pursue collective learning and shared meaning.

A dialogue can be leaderless.

Below are some principles to be considered when engaging in dialogue. It is important to realize that all these principles, though listed separately, are simultaneously interactive parts of the whole.

1. Commitment

Commitment to the process from beginning to end is essential.

2. Listening and speaking without judgment

Withhold agreement and disagreement with a point of view. Withhold your own ideas until you have listened carefully and mindfully to the others with the intent of learning something new from them.

If resistance arises, observe its effect and engage it. Thoughts associated with resistance have a certain quality and registration on the body. Observe these thoughts arise and pass away.

Observe your own thoughts and reactions. Notice how other's thoughts and ideas effect your own thoughts and how your reactions/responses register in your mind and body.

Observe your ideas and motivations as they form. As an idea or feeling that you want to share emerges, notice how it forms, why you may want to say it, and how you feel after you have said it.

3. Identify your own and other's assumptions.

See if you can determine beliefs or assumptions (yours and others) upon which behavior is predicated.

4. Acknowledge the speaker

P A U S E to appreciate and reflect what the other person says. Reflect upon what they say before you think about your own perspective.

5. Respect each person and value them and their opinions

Respect and value the differences in people and opinions that emerge within the group.

6. Balance inquiry and advocacy

Interchanges usually involve advocacy or our own ideas. In a dialogue, continuous inquiry into the ideas of others for the purpose of learning is as important as putting forth your own ideas. It is important to really listen to others.

7. Release needs for specific outcomes

When you look for outcomes, you see everything in the context of what you are looking for. You may not be able to see other important things that are happening outside the context of the outcomes you hold.

8. Speak when moved

Speak when moved by a deeper meaning that comes out of silence from within, not as a "*reaction*" to something else that has been said. This "*movement*" comes from something that is deeper and generative. To do this, proficiency at listening to oneself is needed ...something more in yourself wants to come forth. Often this comes from holding the whole and its parts simultaneously. ***Response replaces reaction.***

9. Go easy on yourself.

These practices are foreign to most of us and it will probably take you a while to get use to them.