

# Imagining A More Civil Society

This 45-minute experience of Dialogue and Story as entry to better relationships and community is adapted from a successful workshop led by Ken Kramarz at the March, 2008 national Hillel Summit: *Imagining A More Civil Society*, in Washington, DC.

It is based on a new quality of deep listening with intent to learn.

## WELCOME and CONTEXT (10 mins)

In the stories from our mystical tradition, we are told that Moshiach (the messiah) will come. “So how will we recognize the messiah when he comes?” Our answer is to treat every person as *if* she or he might be the one. As if this one person has the wisdom or other capacity to save the world. That’s how we listen to each other in Dialogue.

The theme “A More Civil Society” begins with “Amore” which means “love.”

Even very bonded, clannish people seem to do best in a culture of pluralism and inclusion. It seems true for successful schools, and is likely to work on Earth for all humankind.

Wisdom traditions tell us we have two ears and one mouth, so we will listen for twice as long as we speak.

The quality of listening on Earth today is not good; we’re not listening well to one another or to Earth herself, who is appealing to us to treat her better.

Thus, what we will experience about communication today is central to ending wars against people and planet, and in the process becoming truly human and the best we can be.

There are different kinds of communication – Conversation, Discussion, Debate, Dialogue.

Dialogue is **not**:

Conversation – casual, superficial, safe

Discussion – from percussion, concussion – batting around well-formed ideas, waiting for what you want to say next

Debate – with a winner who is elevated, and a loser who is diminished, with the purpose to be right rather than learn or grow closer

### Usual communication:

100% 100 %  
Attentive (preparing to react) React

—————→  
Somewhere along the line, we stop listening and start ramping up a reaction.  
The intention is often to assert, contradict, object, outdo, win, or dismiss in disinterest.

### Dialogue:

100% 100 %  
Attentive (continuing to listen and learn) Inquire

—————→  
In Dialogue, the difference is a new quality of deep listening, without “yes, but.”  
The deep, true intention is the motive to learn, expand one’s world, explore and understand the “other” with inquiry.

To comprehend as if there were to be a test, and the person is the teacher, the expert, the one, messiah.

## **STORYTELLING-LISTENING EXPERIENCE**, introduced by the facilitator **(20 mins)**

In Dialogue that transforms people and relationships, we experience that “an enemy is one whose story we have not heard.”

Said another way, “a story is the shortest distance between people.”

In a moment you will have very special opportunity to listen to another person’s story in this very new way, and to yourself be heard like you’ve never been listened to.

It will be a very short time – just 16 minutes – and it will pass faster than you can imagine.

For the sake of time, I will now pass among you and partner you in pairs, dyads.

To begin, one will be the Listener and will only listen deeply to learn from the partner, the Storyteller, who will speak personally, telling your story – your journey through life that brought you to this place today, beginning with your grandparents or earlier.

As you speak, include what you were taught to think about the “other” - people who were not like you and your family.

The first person, the Storyteller, will speak uninterrupted for 5 minutes.

Then for 3 minutes, the Listener will ask a few good questions: inquire, explore to learn more about what had meaning for you or for the Storyteller.

Then the Storyteller becomes the Listener, and the Listener is the Storyteller.

Don’t worry about time; I’ll watch the clock and inform you during these 16 minutes.

Now begin.

## **ASSIMILATION**, described by the facilitator **(15 mins)**

Please now return to the circle and sit next to your partner.

As you’re moved, please in pairs share what you experienced.

What was it like to tell your story, to be heard, to listen?

## **FOR THE FACILITATOR**

Prepare the people to “begin finishing your thoughts” one minute before the end of each 5- or 3-minute period.

You may choose to walk among the people to monitor how they’re doing, even reminding them lightly that “the Listener only listens, the Storyteller.

If appropriate, you may wish to take photographs to document the experience to pass forward to others.

During the closing assimilation, be patient and still while participants take time and slowly gain willingness to share their experiences. . .which they will, with growing confidence as they hear one another.

Ask occasional, good questions if needed and additive.

At the natural end of the Assimilation, affirm the group and remind them that life in homes, on campuses, at work, and between groups and nations can be this way.

It’s within our grasp.

It begins by sitting down with the “other” in a safe place, with a new quality of deep listening, and asking a simple question: “Would you tell me your story?”

