

בניית עתיד משותף



بناء المستقبل المشترك

**Building A Common Future**

# **Jewish-Palestinian Dialogue**

**Principles and Wisdom**



**Dialogue Guidelines:  
Changing Confrontation to Cooperation**



**Frequently Asked Questions**

Prepared in Fall 2001 by the  
**Jewish-Palestinian Living Room Dialogue Group of San Mateo County**  
celebrating nine years of talking, listening, and cooperating

# ***Resource Principles and Wisdom for Jewish-Palestinian Dialogue***

Two pages prepared for the *Teen-only Forum On The Middle East*  
Jewish Community Center of San Francisco • November 19, 2000



## **About meeting together**

*"Out beyond ideas of rightdoing and wrongdoing, there is a field.  
I'll meet you there."  
Jelaluddin Rumi (1207-1273)*

*"The Jewish tradition is to invite visitors into the sukkah. As we meet here today,  
we invite our Palestinian neighbors into it, to restore trust and confidence."  
Yossi Amrani, S.F. Israeli Consul General, October, 2000*

## **About "story"**

*"There are two stories here and there is a quality of transcendence — seeing  
beyond the 'Jewish Narrative' or the 'Palestinian Narrative' — to a perspective that can  
humanize both sides and hear the 'other' story. A transcender after all has  
abandoned the exclusive quality of his or her narrative of origin."  
Rabbi Andrea Cohen-Kiener, Hartford, CT*

*"An enemy is one whose story we have not heard."  
Mrs. Gene Knudsen-Hoffman*

*"During the many years of my career as a Hebrew teacher for Palestinians in Gaza, and as  
an Arabic teacher for the Jews and foreigners at Ulpan Akiva in Israel, I have heard  
the same kinds of questions and comments expressed by both sides, showing  
how ignorant we are about one another. We know nothing about each other, in spite of  
being the children of sister Semitic languages and having the same cultural roots."*

**Samira Shaa'ban Srur Fadil**  
Director, Palestinian Abraham Language School  
Rimal, Gaza

## **About listening**

*"The Talmud says that  
we were given two ears but  
only one tongue  
to teach us that  
we should listen twice as much as we speak.  
The key to all good human relations is in listening."  
Rabbi Phillip J. Bentley  
Temple Sholom, Floral Park, NY*

## About dialogue

*"Dialogue is to love, what blood is to the body.  
When the flow of blood stops, the body dies.  
When dialogue stops, love dies and resentment and hate are born.  
But dialogue can restore a dead relationship.  
Indeed, this is the miracle of dialogue:  
it can bring relationship into being, and  
it can bring into being once again a relationship that has died.  
There is only one qualification to these claims for dialogue:  
it must be mutual and proceed from both sides,  
and the parties to it must persist relentlessly."*

**Reuel L. Howe**  
**The Miracle of Dialogue, 1963**

*"Suppose we were able to share meanings freely  
without a compulsive urge to impose our view or to conform to those of others and  
without distortion and self-deception.  
Would this not constitute a real revolution in culture?"*  
**David Bohm, Changing Consciousness, 1992**

*"Dialogue is about what we value and how we define it.  
It is about discovering what our true values are, about  
Looking beyond the superficial and automatic answers to our questions. Dialogue is about  
expanding our capacity for attention, awareness and learning with and from each other.  
It is about exploring the frontiers of  
what it means to be human, in relationship to each other and our world."*  
**Glenna Gerard, 1995**

## About the importance of citizens in the public peace process

*"There are some things only governments can do, such as negotiating binding agreements.  
But there are some things that only citizens outside government can do, such as  
changing human relationships."*  
**Dr. Harold Saunders, former U.S. Assistant Secretary of State, and negotiator of the Camp David Accords**

Dr. Saunders clarifies this in his 1999 book, "A PUBLIC PEACE PROCESS:  
*Sustained Dialogue to Transform Racial and Ethnic Conflicts.*"

## About genuine power

*"We will only be mighty when we turn our enemy into our friend."*  
**Rabbi Sydney Mintz, Congregation Emanu-El, San Francisco, October, 2000**

# Dialogue Guidelines: Changing Confrontation to Cooperation

## Why dialogue?

*Beginning with compassionate listening,  
dialogue can dissolve boundaries between people,  
heal relationships, and release unprecedented creativity.  
Dialogue can result in a wellspring of  
new social intelligence previously unimagined.  
Dialogue moves us out of our isolated existence and  
beyond our restricted views.  
We begin to understand diversity  
In perception, in meaning, in expression — in people.  
With this authentic speaking and authentic listening  
to each other, to Earth, to Life,  
together we can invent  
a way of living that works for the benefit of all.*

## Communication

**Communicate:** from *communicare*, to participate, impart, and *communis*, common. To connect; convey knowledge or information; create an opening to, or connection with; transmit information, thought, or feeling so that it is satisfactorily received or understood; open into each other; recount; give; commune; share or participate; possess or enjoy in common; partake of the Lord's supper; reveal clearly.

Not all communication is dialogue. We choose how we wish to communicate. There is ***banal communication*** which feels boring, oppressive, or depressing. This is common when participants are trying to avoid conflict, intimacy, or surprises. It is reflected in extreme politeness, tightly-controlled meetings, and alienated relationships. ***Antagonistic communication*** includes debate, conversation, discussion that can't seem to move beyond conflict. *Discussion* is from the same root word as *percussion* and *concussion*, and connotes striking, shaking and hitting. Discussions are more like ping-pong games, with participants hitting their very solid ideas and well-defended positions back and forth. By comparison, dialogue is ***creative communication*** that engages people's diversity and imagination. It is mutual exploration to build greater shared understanding, meaning, connection, and possibility. The result is better relationships and a new social intelligence.

## Commitment

Effective dialogue is "sustained dialogue." It truly is a process, and takes dedication and time. Successful dialogue cannot be a passing fancy or hobby. It must be a preoccupation. Commitment to each other and to the process is important, as in any relationship. The more all participants are aware of the nature of dialogue and committed to bringing it about, the better the chance it will happen.

## Dialogue compared with Debate

Dialogue is very different than our usual ways of communicating. The specifics of dialogue can be easily forgotten, so it helps to review the principles.

- ***Dialogue is collaborative: two or more sides work together toward common understanding.*** Debate is oppositional: two sides oppose each other and attempt to prove each other wrong.
- ***In dialogue, finding common ground is the goal.*** In debate, winning is the goal.
- ***In dialogue, one listens to the other side(s) in order to understand, find meaning, and find agreement.*** In debate, one listens to the other side in order to find flaws and to counter its arguments.
- ***Dialogue enlarges and possibly changes a participant's point of view.*** Debate affirms a participant's own point of view.
- ***Dialogue reveals assumptions for reevaluation.*** Debate defends assumptions as truth.
- ***Dialogue causes introspection on one's own position.*** Debate causes critique of the other position.
- ***Dialogue opens the possibility of reaching a better solution than any of the original solutions.*** Debate defends one's own positions as the best solution and excludes other solutions.
- ***Dialogue creates an open-minded attitude: an openness to being wrong and an openness to change.*** Debate creates a closed-minded attitude, a determination to be right.
- ***In dialogue, one submits one's best thinking, knowing that other people's reflections will help improve it rather than destroy it.*** In debate, one submits one's best thinking and defends it against challenge to show that it is right.
- ***Dialogue calls for temporarily suspending one's beliefs.*** Debate calls for investing wholeheartedly in one's beliefs.
- ***In dialogue, one searches for basic agreements.*** In debate, one searches for glaring differences.
- ***In dialogue, one searches for strengths in the other positions.*** In debate, one searches for flaws and weaknesses in the other positions.
- ***Dialogue involves a real concern for the other person and seeks to not alienate or offend.*** Debate involves a countering of the other position without focusing on feelings or relationship and often belittles or deprecates the other person.
- ***Dialogue assumes that many people have pieces of the answer and that together they can put them into a workable solution.*** Debate assumes that there is a right answer and that someone has it.
- ***Dialogue remains open-ended.*** Debate implies a conclusion.

## Some Guidelines for Dialogue

### Listening

Listen with compassion and empathy from the heart. Avoid quick judgment or blame. Control the urge to argue, counter, dissuade, or fix.

Listen with equal respect to everyone, regardless of status or roles.

Listen for each person's special contribution to deeper understanding.

Listen from a place of learning rather than confirmation of current thinking.

Listen to the quality of your own listening.

Listen for common threads from the collective, from the community, from the whole – the collective mind.

Listen actively. Try not to let your mind wander or think about what you're going to say while others are speaking. Avoid interrupting.

### Speaking

Speak from your heart, from your authentic life experience, from the moment. When possible, use "I" statements, instead of "we," "you," or "they."

Be willing to contribute even half-formed, unfinished ideas or thoughts. They may be the seeds of new insights and intelligence for the group.

Ask questions from a place of genuine curiosity, wondering, or not knowing, rather than to make a point.

Speak when you are truly "moved" rather than to fill a void. Allow for silence when appropriate.

Share air time. Try not to dominate the conversation.

Use considerate language. Avoid using labels whenever possible.

Acknowledge your new insights gained from the group.

Speak into the circle, into the whole group, into the stream of growing experience and shared meaning.

Avoid cross-talk, to avoid excluding others and turning them into spectators of one-on-one interaction.

When you are silent, indicate your listening presence from time to time in the group, verbally or by eye contact or attentiveness.

Feel free to express your feelings when you have been offended or hurt.

## **Discovering**

Focus on breakthrough-learning rather than being right. Seek to invent a common future with shared meaning, transcending old supposed limitations.

Move back from conclusions, toward observations and discovery. Notice what you're noticing and what meaning you're making of it.

Pay attention to your judgments, assumptions, and certainties. Hold them lightly, explore and examine them, and consider alternatives that may be just as useful.

Be present to what's happening inside you as well as in the group.

Be involved while being detached — open to outcomes but not attached to specific outcomes.

Allow for pauses and silence — reflection has its own rhythms.

Look for deeper levels of understanding. What is the “meaning” of something to the other person?

When there is a disagreement, keep talking. Explore the disagreement and search for areas of agreement — common ground.

Be open to changing your mind. This will help you really listen to others' views.

Respect confidentiality. If you talk about your dialogue experience to people outside of the group, refrain from using people's names or sharing their personal experiences.



## **Frequently Asked Questions About Palestinian-Jewish Dialogue**

In Spring, 2001, after 8 years together, the Jewish–Palestinian Living Room Dialogue Group of San Mateo County, California, was preparing for its 105th meeting. What follows is the limited, still-unfolding experience of a few participants — citizens who believe that the individual makes a difference.

*What is dialogue?*

*Why did you get involved?*

*How did you start?*

*What about those who are neither Palestinians nor Jews?*

*What did you do when you first met?*

*Did you have a facilitator?*

*What was the tone of the first meetings?*

*What kind of commitment is needed?*

*Why do people leave a dialogue group?*

*How does dialogue change people and affect political outcomes?*

*How do you think dialogue in North America makes a difference?*

*In dialogue, what is the "action"?*

*What about those who prefer more political activism?*

*Can a dialogue participant represent a group or institution?*

*When did you do your first public outreach activity?*

*How do you respond in times of crisis?*

*What is dialogue?*

True dialogue is to change the nature of relationships. It is not discussion or debate, or even conflict resolution. Beginning with compassionate listening, it is offering a window to one's own thoughts, mental models, and heart, giving the other person a view into your life experience, reasoning, and humanity. With new, diverse ideas in the midst, and with a spirit of goodwill, divergent views can converge to uncover a new social intelligence for the good of all.

Dialogue is described at <http://www.igc.org/traubman/dialogue.htm>

*Why did you get involved?*

We began a dialogue group in July, 1992, because our life experience revealed that nothing replaces successful face-to-face relationships. Government peace processes were repeatedly failing. Most Jews and Palestinians had never had in-depth relationships nor heard anything but their own narratives, their own stories. Decisions — mostly bad decisions -- continued to be made based on stereotypes and half-truths — ignorance. Creativity, correcting stereotypes, and discovering trustworthy knowledge was not going to come from governments alone, but only with the help of citizens in true dialogue starting with one of the great acts of love — compassionate listening.

*How did you start?*

We began with an idea. Then we found a Palestinian partner. Together we gathered enough women and men for a first meeting — 8-10 willing Jews and Palestinians, and a



few "others." We phoned people we knew and those we didn't. We walked into places of business and introduced ourselves. And we returned and returned again to potential participants until they said "no" or walked through the front door into the dialogue experience. In time, the Palestinian and Jewish participants began opening their own living rooms for the monthly meetings, and we now limit the number to about 30. When new groups start now, it can help to invite in a few "seed" participants from an established dialogue.

***What about those who are neither Palestinians nor Jews?***

These "others," as they call themselves, have been important to our success. They moderate, encourage, and catalyze the dialogue. Their support has been a great contribution.

***What did you do when you first met?***

We introduced ourselves to one another. Many times. We listened to one another's personal stories and life views, at ever-deepening levels of understanding. Some were more quiet, cautious and protected. Some were assertive to the extreme — clinging to anger and hurt — and unable to hear others or focus on anything but their cause and view. We all shared one common interest for sure — food.

***Did you have a facilitator?***

After several meetings, we collectively chose to have a facilitator. In our case, a participant—attorney and mediator, neither Palestinian nor Jew, volunteered. He was excellent — a lion tamer at times — and deserves much of the credit for the success of our sustained endeavor. Even before choosing for a facilitator, the group made its own agreements about preferred meeting times and places, hosting, and standards for being on time, listening, and courtesy — translate that to "interrupting each other."

***What was the tone of the first meetings?***

First meetings can be either courteous or confronting. Each group has a different nature or personality. It is important to make room for flaring, especially when people have been holding their stories within for years, longing to be heard. This is where the others begin to master deep listening.

***What kind of commitment is needed?***

Meaningful dialogue is "sustained dialogue." It truly is a process and takes dedication and time. Successful dialogue cannot be a passing fancy or hobby. It must be a preoccupation. Commitment to each other and to the process is important, as in any relationship.

***Why do people leave a dialogue group?***

People come in for different reasons. Some are quite process-oriented and would simply talk forever; some seek collective "action" and even political statements and stands "now." In our experience, especially in the beginning, people came and then left out of disinterest or impatience, or because they were too busy or didn't think the activity would make a difference. Some were afraid of judgment from within their own cultural, religious, or spiritual communities. Some could not open themselves up to hear any but their own narratives. Some simply sought allies for their cause. In time, for us, a devoted base developed and stayed. Through time, some participants have decided to discontinue, and others have entered the dialogue anew, and with appreciation and enthusiasm.

***How does dialogue change people and affect political outcomes?***

When we hear each other's "stories," we start to expand our identification, and begin to see each other as human and equal. Seeing our oneness — and differences, as well — we begin to want the best for each other. We see that we are inextricably interrelated and interdependent — neighbors forever. If enough citizens begin to have this experience, it will make the environment fertile and right for the government peace process to go to completion.

***How do you think dialogue in North America makes a difference?***

We can have an important affect on the Middle East, through our government's diplomatic, military, and economic policies. We can also contribute useful perceptions and even wisdom, being at a distance from the emotional centers of conflict. Perhaps most important is our tradition of freedom and creativity with which we can discover new models of thinking and treating one other. Many of us have family and friends in Israel/Palestine to whose thinking and spirit we can contribute, especially with the help of telephone and Internet communication, and a Web site.

***In dialogue, what is the "action"?***

The action of dialogue is building relationships, and expanding the circle of people who engage in that activity.

***What about those who prefer more political activism?***

In time, individuals who begin to discover more and identify with a larger frame of reference for themselves may grow impatient with this process and helping others enter it. They might choose to express their conclusions and political stands more publicly. But the true "action" of dialogue is to widen the circle of relationships in which former enemies expand their identification and begin to want the best for each other. Then, political outcomes that serve both peoples equally are more likely to go to completion. Other kinds of expressions about positions, statements, and causes are also important and needed. But they do not correct stereotypes and fundamental attitudes of people toward each other. This is the function of dialogue.

***Can a dialogue participant represent a group or institution?***

Each participant enters dialogue as an individual speaking only for herself or himself, free from any attachments to other people or groups. Attachment to the positions, interests, or judgment of a whole collective removes the freedom needed for authentic individual participation. It is helpful for people in leadership to acknowledge their affiliations, and simply do the very best they can in dialogue.

***When did you do your first public outreach activity?***

We did not do any kind of public outreach for until over a year and a half, because we didn't feel we had anything to say until then. We needed time to build trust and to learn, enabling our outreach to be successful. Any earlier action would have been "skipping steps" in the relationship-building public peace process.

See <http://www.igc.org/traubman/pubpeace.htm>

***How do you respond in times of crisis?***

When your peoples and their governments are in trying times — violence, disarray, perturbation — the most important thing is to be there for each other. Do not withdraw

from one other. People's expectations may not be met, but it is better to at least share your common humanity — both pain and hopes — and widen the circle of those who can begin to identify with each other, than to allow the continuation of the awful stereotypes that push around and paralyze both peoples, in America and in the Middle East.

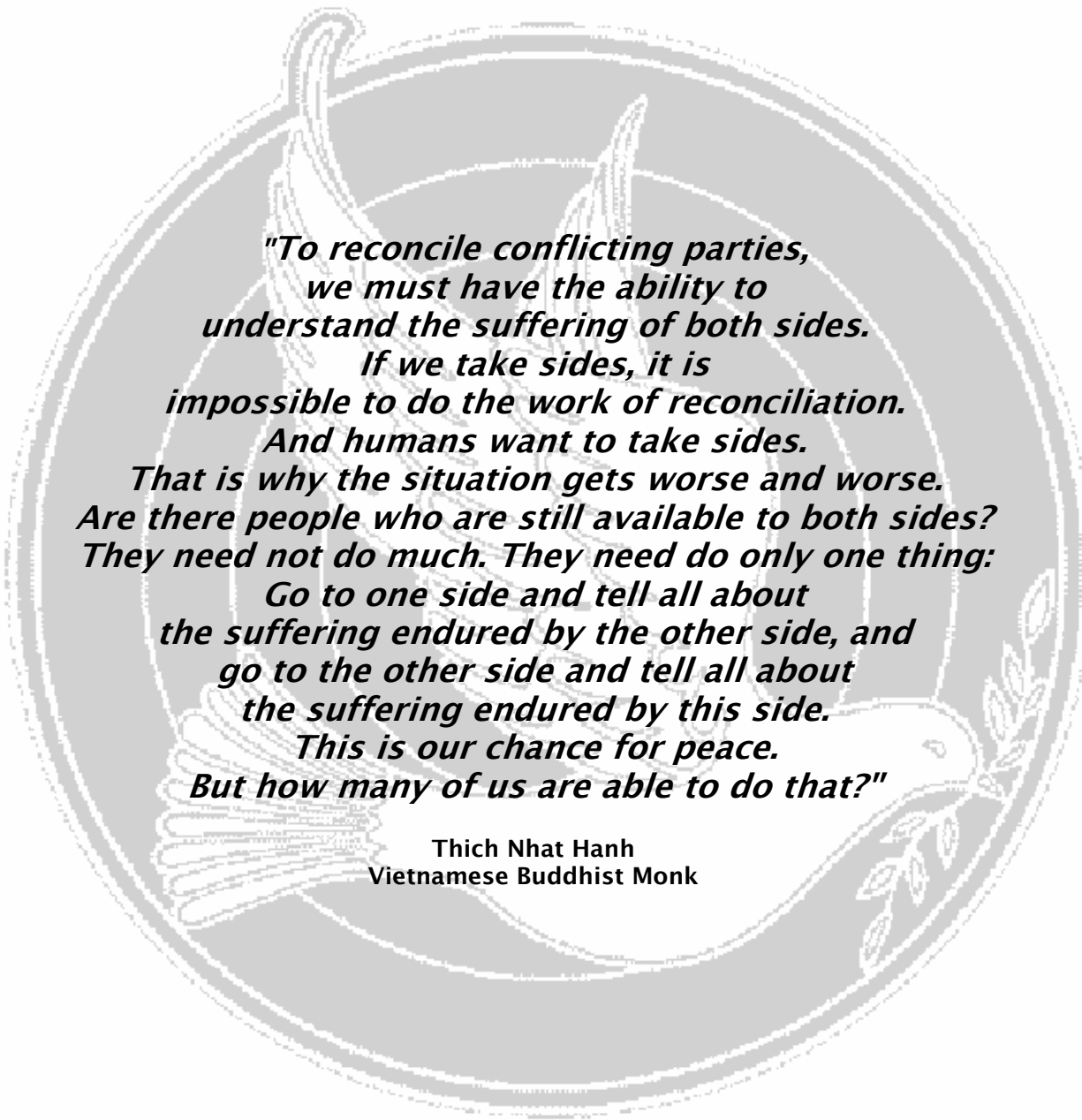
*"People don't get along because they fear each other.  
People fear each other because they don't know each other.  
They don't know each other because  
they have not properly communicated with each other."*  
Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.



*"Never doubt that  
a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world.  
Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."*  
Margaret Mead

For additional materials and support:

**Jewish-Palestinian Living Room Dialogue Group**  
1448 Cedarwood Drive, San Mateo, CA 94403  
Search the Web for "Palestinian Jewish Progress" or "Jewish Palestinian Dialogue"  
Voice: 650-574-8303 • Fax: 650-573-1217 • E-mail: LTraubman@igc.org



***"To reconcile conflicting parties,  
we must have the ability to  
understand the suffering of both sides.  
If we take sides, it is  
impossible to do the work of reconciliation.  
And humans want to take sides.  
That is why the situation gets worse and worse.  
Are there people who are still available to both sides?  
They need not do much. They need do only one thing:  
Go to one side and tell all about  
the suffering endured by the other side, and  
go to the other side and tell all about  
the suffering endured by this side.  
This is our chance for peace.  
But how many of us are able to do that?"***

**Thich Nhat Hanh  
Vietnamese Buddhist Monk**