

From Discussion To Dialogue —Moving Toward Greater Understanding

by Edward E. Morler, M.B.A., Ph.D

Ideally, the purpose of communication is to expand understanding. More often, however, “communication” involves one or both parties trying to convince the other of the “rightness” of their viewpoint. There tends to be very little, if any, real listening or acknowledgment from or by either party. Different viewpoints are too often taken as attacks that “need” to be defended rather than simply different viewpoints. Far too often, rather than expanding understanding, these “attempts” at “communication” result in upsets, increased intolerance, and even less understanding. David Bohm called this form of often contra-productive “communication” discussion. He suggested we would be much better served by dialogue rather than discussion. Dialogue is an attempt to get the communication process back on track.

In dialogue there is only the presentation of viewpoints. Judgements are suspended with the *intention* of building a climate of trust. It is the *authenticity* of honest interaction that develops trust. There are no attempts to convince the other party or to defend a position or to obtain specific results. Rather, there is the intention to set aside prejudices, truthfully share our own viewpoint, and be open to and honestly desire to learn about and from the other person’s perspective.

The *willingness* of *both* parties to learn from each other is a quality essential for dialogue. When that quality is present, dialogue takes place just by being together. When we are truly open and believe there is something valuable to learn from the other, then not only do we expand awareness of the other, but also of ourselves. Not only does dialogue expand the *breadth* of understanding, but also offers the probability of reaching greater *depths* within ourselves.

For dialogue to be meaningful *both* parties must be open to both the positives and the negatives of their own position. *Both* parties must understand that there can be truth outside their current set of “truths.” *Both* parties need to be open to the possibility that by engaging in dialogue their position and viewpoint may change.

By the act of observing and listening deeply, are we able to appreciate the beauty and value not only in our own viewpoint, but that of others. This is freedom—freedom *from* the limitation of our own self-imposed intolerance and the fear that is its foundation. It is also freedom *to* learn and grow. With real dialogue we are more open-minded, understanding, empathetic, and loving. Dialogue is validating and honoring to all parties. It increases rapport and builds respect. It broadens our consideration of what is possible. It expands our options and choices.

By recognizing when we are in discussion rather than dialogue we open the door to improving real communication. By owning how we are creating, allowing, or contributing to this non-productive, usually negative form of interaction we are taking responsibility for our impact thus empowering ourselves. By forgiving ourselves for our past “discussions” we can put our attention on more positive desired outcomes. By consciously and proactively changing from discussion to dialogue, we open the door to a whole new world of expanded awareness.

True dialogue should be our *conscious intention* in every interaction.