



# **CONSTRUCTIVE CONVERSATIONS**

## **About the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict**

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A Guide for Convening and Facilitating  
Dialogue in Jewish Communities in the US



Produced by Public Conversations Project, Watertown, MA  
in collaboration with the Jewish Dialogue Group, Philadelphia, PA

## **Constructive Conversations About the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict**

A Guide for Convening and Facilitating Dialogue in Jewish Communities in the US

Maggie Herzig with Mitch Chanin

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# Dedication

Who is wise? The one who learns from everyone, as it is said  
“From all who would teach me, I have gained understanding.”

*Pirkei Avot 4:1*

One can speak [and it is] like the piercing of a sword,  
but the tongue of the wise is a healing.

*Proverbs 12:18*

The Eternal God has taught me how to speak, even to those tired of speech.  
Morning by morning God awakens me, awakens my ear: teaching me to listen.

*Isaiah 50:4*

**We dedicate this guide to all who  
seek to listen and speak in ways  
that foster understanding.**

## About Public Conversations Project

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The mission of the Public Conversations Project (PCP) is to promote constructive conversations among those who have different values, worldviews and positions related to divisive controversies. Participants in PCP's collaboratively designed and carefully facilitated conversations develop more effective ways of relating, greater mutual understanding and deepened trust—all of which opens the way to new ideas and effective action.

Since its founding in 1989, PCP has worked on a variety of issues including abortion, the environment, sexual orientation, and religious and ethnic conflict. PCP's methods have proven to be effective not only in situations of hot and loud conflict, but also in situations characterized by disconnection, suspicion, awkward silence, and stereotyping. Project Associates, many of whom are trained as family therapists and mediators, have worked not only with local communities and organizations, but also with regional, national, and international organizations.

PCP offers meeting design and facilitation services, consultation, and training programs. Its innovative work has been recognized by several organizations including the International Association for Public Participation, the Kensington Consultation Centre in London, England, the National Conference for Peacemaking and Conflict Resolution (NCPCR), and the Association for Conflict Resolution.

## About the Jewish Dialogue Group

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The Jewish Dialogue Group (JDG) is a Philadelphia-based grassroots organization founded in November 2001 to promote constructive dialogue within Jewish communities about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. JDG's board members, staff, and volunteers represent a wide range of political perspectives, while sharing a commitment to values of justice and compassion. As an organization, they do not take positions on any issues, but focus solely on promoting open discussion. JDG organizes and facilitates dialogue programs of several different kinds in order to help people to

- listen to and understand one other, across political differences
- talk through their feelings
- examine difficult moral and intellectual questions
- think through the choices they face

JDG's volunteer facilitators have led more than eighty dialogue sessions at synagogues, colleges, high schools, summer camps, and other venues throughout the Philadelphia region and in New York. These sessions have attracted almost one thousand Jews of diverse ages, backgrounds, religious affiliations, and political perspectives. JDG uses formats developed by the Public Conversations Project and the National Coalition Building Institute ([www.ncbi.org](http://www.ncbi.org)).

They also offer facilitation training workshops and consult with people who want to conduct dialogue programs. In addition, they are now developing a guidebook for “deliberation” about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Through deliberation workshops, Jews who are struggling to figure out how to respond to the conflict will examine the choices they face in a systematic way and work towards making well-informed, well thought-out decisions.



# Preface

Welcome to our dialogue guide! This guide offers general advice and step-by-step instructions to help you facilitate constructive conversations among Jews about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

In the dialogue sessions that we describe, participants meet in small groups of five to eight people for a conversation that is structured to promote careful listening and reflection. As the facilitator, you will propose communication agreements and ask questions that encourage people to speak about their ambivalence and dilemmas as well as their convictions and certainties. Then you will guide participants through the conversation and help them to honor their communication agreements.

You don't need specialized training in order to do this work—just a basic level of comfort and skill working with groups, an ability to give equal support to participants with diverse perspectives, and a willingness to learn and experiment. Whether you have never done anything like this, or you are an experienced facilitator, we hope you find what you need here.

You can use the guide to conduct dialogues with members of a specific community, such as congregants in a synagogue or students in a particular school, or with people who don't share an organizational affiliation and come together just for this conversation. You can use the guide for both one-time events and dialogues that involve multiple meetings over weeks or months, and for both small events and bigger programs that involve multiple break-out groups.

The guide is lengthy because it addresses not only the facilitation of a dialogue session, but all of the steps leading up to and following the session. It offers guidance for determining what kind of dialogue might be helpful in a community, deciding who to invite, planning an agenda, gathering feedback, and following up. Chapters 3, 4, and 6 consist mainly of questions and answers about tasks involved in planning and conducting dialogues. An index of these questions appears at the end of the guide.

The guide includes step-by-step instructions for several types of dialogues. They are laid out like lesson plans, with detailed scripts. You can use them exactly as they are, or modify them to address specific needs and accommodate your own style. We also include a section on the Public Conversations Project's general approach to designing and facilitating constructive conversations on divisive issues in order to help those who wish to custom design a dialogue. The Appendices include sample agendas, invitations, and flyers, and materials that you can copy to use as handouts.

Judaism teaches that dialogue is a sacred activity, and the tradition offers many specific teachings about dialogue and respectful communication, such as the Talmudic concepts of “controversy for the sake of heaven” and “guarding the tongue” from hurtful speech. A special appendix describes some of these teachings and suggests ways to bring Jewish teachings and traditions into your dialogues.

If you decide to use this guide, we have two requests: First, please share what you learn with us so we can improve future editions. Second, please cite this document appropriately, not only as an act of respect, but also to ensure that people who read any materials you distribute will know how to contact us with questions or feedback. We invite you to join us in expanding and improving the resources that are available to others who wish to do this work with care and creativity.

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# Acknowledgments

This guide would not be possible without volunteers, colleagues and supporters who believed in the need for this guide and who believed in us.

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The lead author of this guide, Maggie Herzig, is grateful to her PCP colleagues whose collective work is represented here: Corky Becker, Meenakshi Chakraverti, Dick Chasin, Laura Chasin, Dave Joseph, Bill Madsen, Sallyann Roth, and Bob Stains. Special thanks go to Laura Chasin, who provided extensive feedback on an early draft, Meenakshi Chakraverti for editorial help, and PCP's leadership team, Laura Chasin, Talya Bosch, Bob Stains, and Susan Wheeler, without whose wisdom and hard work this guide would not exist.

PCP gratefully acknowledges Equity Trust for supporting the creation of this guide and the JAMS Foundation for supporting the creation of a similar guide, entitled *Fostering Dialogue Across Divides: A Nuts and Bolts Guide from the Public Conversations Project*. Work on that "generic" guide benefited work on this guide, and vice versa.

The Jewish Dialogue Group would like to thank our colleagues and teachers at the Public Conversations Project, for pouring so much of their time and energy into creating this guide. When we first began using PCP's approach to facilitating dialogue three and a half years ago, we never imagined that we would soon be collaborating with them to create a new publication. We have been honored to work with them, and we are very grateful for their commitment to this project. We are especially grateful to Maggie Herzig for her incredible thoughtfulness, patience, insight, and dedication.

The JDG's Executive Director, Mitch Chanin, would like to thank all of the Jewish Dialogue Group facilitators and other volunteers who have helped to write, edit, and pilot this guide. More than twenty people have reviewed sections of the guide, tested it in dialogue sessions, and revised it word by word, including: Joseph Berman, Barbara Bloomfield, Carrie Borgenicht, Allison Carter, Mira Colflesh, Phyllis Denbo, Dr. Saundra Sterling Epstein, M.J. Fine, Grace Flisser, Lee Fogel, Rabbi Nancy Fuchs-Kreimer, Ayala Guy, Austin Kelley, Adam Levick, David Loeb, David Mosenkis, Beth Perry, Jessie Posilkin, Steven Pysner, Debra Rappaport, Laura Richlin, Jim Rosenstein, Iden Rosenthal, Lisa Santer, Rabbi Rachel Schoenfeld, Heather Shafter, Andrea Siegel, Rosalind Spigel, Roberta Spivek, Rebecca Subar, and Wendy Univer.

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 The Need for Dialogue Among Jews about the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

*“I think this is the first actual conversation I ever had about Israel. Up until now, I’ve always felt like I had to just put out an oversimplified position and one-liners and then keep defending them.”*

—a longtime activist, offering personal highlights at the conclusion of a dialogue session at his university

*“We figured out that we really can talk about Israel in our congregation, and that we can welcome diversity about this issue in the same way that we welcome diverse approaches to worship. I feel like this has helped us to get unstuck. I think that if we keep talking, we can figure out how to move forward.”*

—a participant in a three-part dialogue series at a synagogue

Many Jews in the U.S. find it very difficult to talk in constructive ways about the Israeli-Palestinian<sup>1</sup> conflict with people who hold different views.

Many individuals who have strong convictions are embroiled in polarized, bitter arguments with friends, colleagues, family members, or classmates. Others hold back from discussing the situation for fear of these arguments, or for fear of being ostracized for their feelings or ideas. Many organizations are caught in paralyzing internal conflict, and some Jewish communities are facing fragmentation and attrition as members who are frustrated or isolated begin to withdraw.

At the same time, many Jews who feel ambivalent or confused about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict are seeking a deeper and more complex understanding of the situation, but cannot find any place in which they can talk through their feelings, ideas, questions, and dilemmas in a way that is useful to them. Many Jews are struggling to figure out how to respond to the conflict, to decide which actions would reflect their values and would be effective. Often they don’t know where to begin.

As people attempt to sort through these issues, they face several obstacles. Many people feel overwhelmed by fear, anger, or sorrow and therefore find it difficult to think clearly about the situation. People often feel

*Many Jews do not have a place to talk through their dilemmas in a manner that encourages unhurried reflection, exploration of complex feelings, and connections across differences.*

<sup>1</sup> Some people prefer to describe this conflict as the “Arab-Israeli conflict” rather than the “Israeli-Palestinian conflict,” or to use another phrase. Which term best applies depends on one’s frame of reference. The Jewish Dialogue Group has found that the great majority of dialogue participants find “Israeli-Palestinian conflict” to be an appropriate and relatively non-controversial way of naming the issue. In this document we use “Israeli-Palestinian conflict” consistently. We recommend that when you facilitate a dialogue program, you use the term that you think will be least controversial for your group. During a dialogue program, participants may want to discuss the question of which term to use, and the issues underlying the choice of one term or another. We recommend that you steer the group away from beginning with this discussion, however. In most cases, the group will find discussion about this question more constructive after a spirit of dialogue has been established and participants have begun to develop mutual respect and trust.

overwhelmed by information as well, and bewildered by the conflicting interpretations of history and current events and the disparate versions of the facts they encounter.

*Structured, facilitated dialogue sessions can enable people to have constructive conversations that would otherwise be impossible.*

When people attempt to explore their questions with others, a number of frustrating patterns often develop. They may find themselves being attacked, lectured, or recruited, despite the good intentions of their conversation partners. Despite their own best intentions, they may find themselves attacking, lecturing, or attempting to recruit others to their point of view, even when they aren't sure themselves what to think or do. They may simply find themselves stuck in despair or confusion.

Structured, facilitated dialogue sessions can enable people to have constructive conversations that would otherwise be impossible.

They can serve both to help people to talk in constructive ways

across differences, and to talk through their own dilemmas and questions. Many synagogues and organizations offer their members opportunities to hear speakers about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict or to engage in advocacy. However, many groups have not been able to offer their members a way to engage in conversations that allow for unhurried reflection, exploration of complex feelings, and connections across differences.

The Jewish Dialogue Group's experience suggests that groups and individuals may be attracted to dialogue for several different purposes:

- Synagogues, schools, or organizations that are wracked by internal conflict want to figure out how their members and constituents can share the same community without ignoring or papering over their differences.
- Individuals want to repair relationships with friends, family members, or colleagues.
- Synagogues and groups that have been afraid to engage in political discussion want to find a safe way to open up conversation about Israel.
- Activists want to reach across various political divides to talk with people on the "other side."
- Synagogues want to figure out how they can plan an Israel education program that addresses the varied needs and interests of a politically diverse congregation and hope that dialogue can serve as a first step.
- People who feel conflicted, confused, or ambivalent want to sort out their own feelings, hear a variety of views, and test out different ways of thinking about the situation.
- Organizations want to engage in dialogue as a first step toward making important decisions.
- People want to develop skills that they can use to talk in more constructive ways about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and other emotionally charged issues, in a variety of contexts.

## 1.2 What We Mean By Dialogue

The word "dialogue" is used in many different ways. It is often used to describe any conversation—planned or spontaneous—in which people search for and gain a better understanding of each other's perspectives. In the workplace, it is sometimes used to describe a conversation in which people set aside

their usual task-orientation in order to explore more deeply and openly their hopes, concerns, needs, and visions for their work. In political contexts, it is sometimes used to describe a discussion of different perspectives that aims to be less divisive than usual, though it may not achieve that aim.

In our work with people who have different points of view on divisive issues, we have come to think about the “dialogue” we hope to foster in the manner described below. This definition also appears in Appendix A in a format suited for handing out in dialogue sessions. Appendix B presents a table that contrasts dialogue and polarized debate.

### **What dialogue is**

At the Public Conversation Project, we define dialogue as a conversation in which the participants’ primary goal is to pursue mutual understanding rather than agreement or immediate solutions. As participants pursue this goal, they sometimes decide to pursue other goals. For example, dialogue groups sometimes decide to become better informed together, or to build consensus about ways that they can act on shared values while continuing to have significant areas of disagreement.

### **What dialogue is not**

Dialogue is distinct from debate; in fact, participants in dialogue often agree explicitly to set aside persuasion and debate so that they can focus on mutual understanding. Dialogue is also different from mediation, conflict resolution, and problem solving although it may serve as a prelude to or aspect of such processes.

### **What participants do**

- They listen and are listened to with care.
- They speak and are spoken to in a respectful manner.
- They share “airtime” so that all speakers can be heard.
- They learn about the perspectives of others.
- They reflect on their own views.

*Dialogue happens any time people genuinely seek mutual understanding, setting aside for that time, the urge to persuade or the pressure to decide.*

### **What participants gain**

- Greater mutual understanding, which may stimulate new ideas for learning and action.
- Communication skills that can be used in other conversations about divisive issues.

### **What it takes**

Dialogue happens any time people genuinely seek mutual understanding, setting aside for that time, the urge to persuade or the pressure to decide. It can occur spontaneously, among friends, in classrooms, in synagogue discussions, or even among strangers. When people are experiencing polarized conflict, however, they may need to agree on an explicit purpose and structure for their conversation in order to have a constructive dialogue. Before beginning the dialogue, participants usually make communication agreements that will help them to achieve this goal.

Dialogues are usually facilitated by an impartial facilitator. Facilitators do not share their own views on the issues being discussed. Their sole responsibility is to help the participants honor their agreements and reach their shared goals.

You can bring a spirit of dialogue into other kinds of programs as well, such as study groups, classes, visioning exercises, and advocacy campaigns. Teachers, organizers, and community leaders sometimes find

it useful to conduct formal dialogue sessions as part of these programs, or just to bring in elements of dialogue, such as structured go-rounds, communication agreements, or questions that ask people to reflect on their feelings and experience as well as their ideas.

### **1.3 Dialogue in the Jewish Tradition: Controversy for the Sake of Heaven**

The Jewish Dialogue Group has found that in some communities, it is useful to describe the purpose and structure of the dialogue program in terms of traditional Jewish teachings.

The Jewish tradition teaches that dialogue is a sacred activity, as reflected in teachings about “controversy for the sake of heaven” in the Talmud, the compendium of Jewish law, rabbinical discussions, and stories compiled around 200 to 550 C.E. Martin Buber, one of the most important and well-known Jewish philosophers of the twentieth century wrote extensively about dialogue. Judaism also includes many teachings about respectful communication, including the concept of *Derech Eretz*, the requirement to treat others with respect, and the concept of *Lashon Hara*, the requirement to avoid speaking ill of others. Structured, facilitated dialogue can give people a way to bring these values into their conversations about Israel. Singing, blessings, rituals, and silence can also be incorporated into dialogue programs, marking out the dialogue session as “sacred space.” See Appendix N.

### **1.4 Different Ways to Use This Guide**

You may want to start at the beginning of the guide and read through to the end.

Alternatively, you could start by skimming the sample formats and questions in Chapter 7, and then turn back to Chapter 2, which presents the thinking behind the suggestions offered. If the general approach appeals to you and the sample format ideas seem useful, you can proceed to Chapters 3 through 6 for step-by-step advice about planning and facilitating a dialogue.

Chapter 3 explains how to figure out what kind of dialogue makes sense in a particular situation, who to invite, and how to invite them. It also explains how to collaborate with the potential participants to create a program that meets their specific needs. Chapter 3 will guide you through deciding who should facilitate, where and when the sessions should take place, and how long they should last.

Chapter 4 will guide you in creating a detailed, step-by-step agenda for your dialogue program once you have made these basic decisions.

Chapter 5 offers advice about preparing yourself to facilitate. It includes a checklist that will help you to keep track of all the various tasks involved in getting ready for the session.

Chapter 6 offers guidance in facilitating the dialogue. While the ideas in Chapters 3 through 5 pertain to the work you will do before the session begins, Chapter 6 offers advice about ways to handle issues that may arise during the meeting.

Chapters 3 through 6 are written in a question and answer format. You can find an index of all the questions in the final appendix.

Chapter 7 offers sample formats and questions. You can use these exactly as they are, following the scripts closely. Alternatively, you can modify them to fit your own style or the group's specific needs. The formats can also be used as a source of ideas for a custom designed dialogue. You might even find in the formats some ideas that you can bring into spontaneous and informal conversations with family and friends.

The appendices include supplementary readings, sample invitations and flyers, and a number of pages that you can use as handouts. You may decide to photocopy and distribute the handouts as they are, or adapt them to meet the needs of a specific group. Please cite the Public Conversations Project when appropriate. See Appendix C for a sample agenda with a citation.

## 1.5 Is This Work For You? Getting Started As a Facilitator Or Convener

People of many backgrounds have successfully planned and facilitated dialogues using earlier versions of this guide, including mediators and therapists, on the one hand, and people with no formal training, on the other. To do this work you will need a basic level of comfort and skill in working with groups and confidence that you can be equally supportive of all participants in a conversation about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. You need to be trustworthy in the eyes of the participants, but you don't need formal credentials.

The deeper the divisions in the group, and the more painful those divisions have been in the community, the more care and experience will be required to plan and facilitate the dialogue. If you'd like to work with a group that may be difficult to facilitate and/or you are new to facilitation, we recommend that you start slow and easy. For example, you might do a "test run" of one of the formats with a group of friends who will give you feedback and encouragement. You could also start by facilitating a group in which the participants already treat each other with trust and respect, and/or a group in which political and religious divides are not large. In addition, you will probably benefit from experiencing a dialogue about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict before you take on the challenge of facilitating a dialogue about the conflict.

*To do this work you will need a basic level of comfort and skill in working with groups and confidence that you can be equally supportive of all participants in a conversation about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.*

Given the emotional intensity of this issue, no matter how experienced you are, you may want to consider working in a team or with a network of facilitators who can support and advise each other. The people involved with PCP and JDG have benefited enormously from our team members whose varied skills and insights, and commitment to mutual learning, have greatly improved the quality of our work. Working together also enhances the overall experience of doing the work. Challenges faced alone can feel burdensome and deflating; challenges faced as a team are more likely to be experienced as opportunities for growth and learning.

This guide can also be helpful to people who are interested just in organizing a dialogue program, but not facilitating. If you see yourself as convener of dialogue, but not as a facilitator, you can think about who might be willing and able to facilitate and provide them with (1) this guide, (2) some words of encouragement, (3) your own sense of the need for dialogue, personally and in your community, and (4) any ideas you have about how you might work together in the planning process.

If you are uncertain about what role is right for you, see Section 3.2, which describes the facilitator and convener roles, addresses questions about who is or is not well-suited to facilitate (for example, should the facilitator be Jewish?), and suggests ways you may choose to work with a co-facilitator. See also Chapter 5 on “Getting Ready for the Session,” and Chapter 6, which offers tips on responding to common facilitation challenges.

If you would like training or help connecting with experienced facilitators, contact PCP or JDG. If you would like to learn how JDG developed its network of volunteer facilitators, don’t hesitate to call or write.

## 1.6 How This Guide Was Developed

This guide is an adaptation and expansion of *Constructive Conversations for Challenging Times: A Guide to Community Dialogue*, which was produced by PCP in the wake of the 9/11 attacks. That guide was motivated by a concern that when Americans tried to talk across a difference of perspective about our government’s response to the attacks, they often found themselves to be misunderstood, stereotyped or estranged from others who they cared about. As a result, many people talked only with others of similar ideology and identity.

This idea for this guide, which was prepared in collaboration with the Jewish Dialogue Group (JDG) of Philadelphia, grew out of JDG’s recognition that similar dynamics exist in many Jewish communities in the U.S. when people discuss the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. For three years, JDG has been adapting and field-testing PCP’s Community Guide and other PCP materials,<sup>2</sup> generously sharing with us their experiences, ideas and questions. They have convened dozens of dialogue sessions in synagogues, colleges, high schools, and other venues in the Philadelphia area and New York City.

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<sup>2</sup>JDG has also taken training and used formats from the National Coalition Building Institute in some of its dialogue sessions. For more information, see [www.ncbi.org](http://www.ncbi.org).



## 2. Getting Grounded

### The Public Conversations Project's General Approach

The Public Conversations Project's (PCP) dialogue programs invite people to move out of conversations that they find neither satisfying nor enlightening and into fresh, constructive, and wished-for conversations.

Therefore, we typically talk with potential participants to find out how they have experienced conversations (or the absence of conversations) about the divisive issue, and what kinds of conversations they would like to have.

When we ask these questions, we typically learn about unsatisfying conversations that are highly polarized and divisive—conversations from which some community members distance themselves, choosing instead to be silent in the presence of people who might have different views. And we often learn that the community would be enriched and energized if its members could find new ways of talking about their different perspectives.

*PCP's dialogue programs invite people out of conversations that they find neither satisfying nor enlightening and into fresh and constructive conversations.*

### 2.1 Common Patterns in Divisive Conversations

The following patterns are common in long-standing political conflicts.

- Public speaking about the issue is often dominated by people who are passionately certain. People who are uncertain or have mixed views remain silent for fear of appearing disloyal, ignorant, or unprincipled.
- Vocal groups portray themselves as the protectors of the important values or objectives and their opponents as ignorant, reckless, or motivated by selfish or destructive purposes.
- Public debates often have a free-for-all quality. Interruptions, angry outbursts, and personal attacks are common.
- People on each side of an argument selectively pay attention to and remember evidence that supports their views. They tend to search for evidence of lies, ill intent, and ignorance in the assertions of their opponents.
- People use slogans, short hand, and buzz words that simplify the issues and mean different things to different people. Their meanings are rarely unpacked or clarified.
- Few genuine questions are asked; assumptions about the meanings, intentions and values of the opponent go untested.
- Little new information surfaces; the conversation becomes repetitive and feels old.

These patterns are most discernible in hot conflicts across lines of ideology or identity. However, they also surface within groups whose members have a shared identity and common goals, but different strategies

for achieving those shared goals, or different priorities. Sometimes these patterns are hidden by an uneasy silence that cloaks underlying disagreement. People may avoid conversation about the issue for fear of experiencing these patterns.

*Silence, when it comes from fear of speaking up, is not benign. It can stifle authentic human connection and may even undermine collaboration on less controversial issues.*

■ The recommendations in this guide assume that at least some of these patterns are occurring in the community in which the guide will be used, at least in subtle forms, or that community members fear that these patterns would erupt if they were to talk about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Such fear is not always unfounded. Silence, when it comes from fear of speaking up, is not benign—it can stifle authentic human connection and may even undermine collaboration on less controversial issues.

The recommendations in this guide are also useful in situations in which participants share a general perspective related to a controversy and simply want to explore the nuances of their

beliefs, feelings, and uncertainties, without fear of being stereotyped as “muddled” or less “principled” than people whose beliefs are more easily categorized.

In this guide we offer suggestions for helping people to set aside some common patterns of divisive debate but we do not intend to suggest that all debates are destructive. On the contrary, debates can be quite valuable and enlightening. Debate and advocacy are important tools in democracy. In long-standing conflicts, however—especially those that involve identity issues, histories of trauma, and a deep sense of threat to one’s basic security and dignity—debate is often highly polarized and “stuck.” It is in those situations that the “old” patterns make it difficult for people to explore a range of perspectives openly, to reflect deeply on their own perspectives, and to connect with each other across differences. Dialogue may help to prepare people for more constructive debate.



## 2.2 What Participants May Hope to Find in a New Conversation

When divisiveness occurs in a community—whether it shows up in heated arguments, cold silence, scrupulous avoidance, or all of the above—many people experience a sense of loss. It may be a loss of authenticity, as false camaraderie covers over feelings of distrust and estrangement. It may be a loss of energy and commitment, resulting in withdrawal or apathy. It may be a vague feeling of not belonging or a feeling of abandonment. It may be the loss of joy that is associated with a safe and loving community, as people in the community become increasingly critical of each other's viewpoints and more susceptible to stereotyping or being stereotyped.

Participants in Jewish dialogues about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict usually hope to find increased connection, healing, respect, safety and hope. In addition, they may want to talk through their dilemmas so that they can figure out for themselves how to respond to the conflict in a way that feels authentic, informed and constructive. Participants typically want to be known for who they know themselves to be, rather than through the distorted lens of a stereotype or label. They may also want their energy to be directed toward security, justice and joy, not drained by fear and aggravation. They may want to feel proud of—and supported by—their full community, not just individual members.

*Participants may want to talk through their dilemmas so that they can figure out for themselves how to respond to the conflict in a way that feels authentic, informed and constructive.*

The comic on the following page offers an illustration of two different kinds of conversations, one polarized, frustrating, and unconstructive, and other open, respectful, and constructive. You may want to photocopy it and hand it out to participants in your dialogue programs. It is a good supplement to the “self help tools” for participants in Appendix I.

## Two Kinds of Conversations

**ANATOMY OF A CONVERSATION GONE WRONG**

I'M FOR 'W' ALL THE WAY

ARE YOU SERIOUS?! THAT SEEMS STUPID.

IT'S NOT STUPID TO SUPPORT THE PRESIDENT AND OUR TROOPS!

NICE SOUND BITE, NO SUBSTANCE.

MY FAMILY'S SAFETY IS SUBSTANCE TO ME! PERIOD.

EXACTLY! NOW OUR KIDS ARE DYING IN IRAQ, AND THE U.S. IS LESS SAFE.

WHY BOTHER EVEN TALKING TO HIM?

PEOPLE LIKE HIM DON'T UNDERSTAND ANYTHING.

**ANATOMY OF A CONVERSATION GONE RIGHT**

I'M FOR 'W' ALL THE WAY!

REALLY?! WHY ARE YOU SO INTO BUSH?

9/11 SCARED ME TO DEATH, AND I'M STILL AFRAID.

I DIDN'T KNOW YOU FEEL THAT WAY. I DO, TOO.

WAIT, I THOUGHT YOU ... UH, WHAT WORRIES YOU?

TERRORISM, JOBS, SCHOOLS, THE ENVIRONMENT, IRAQ.

'W' HAS THE STRENGTH WE NEED. BUT U.S. ISOLATION WORRIES ME.

ME TOO. WHAT PRESIDENTIAL STRENGTHS COULD HELP US RECONNECT WITH OTHER COUNTRIES?

**PRINCIPLE:**  
Ask questions out of genuine interest.

**PRINCIPLE:**  
Speak from personal experience before exploring positions.

**PRINCIPLE:**  
Examine your assumptions by checking with others.

**PRINCIPLE:**  
Explore your doubts as well as your certainties.

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## 2.3 PCP's Core Practices and Principles

In the following sections, we describe four key elements of PCP's practice:

- 1) We place a high premium on participant "ownership" of the conversation and on ensuring that the people who attend will do so with clear and accurate expectations about what the dialogue is and what it isn't.
- 2) When we design the dialogue, we build a strong "container" through the use of a) communication agreements and b) structures for speaking, listening, and reflecting.
- 3) We pose well-crafted, purposeful questions in the crucial opening phase of the dialogue.
- 4) We facilitate in a manner that is responsive to participants' evolving goals and needs.

These practices are grounded in the following principles:

- 1) *Prevention is preferable to intervention.*

If participants arrive at a dialogue expecting and prepared for a debate, it will be a challenge for even a well-designed structure and a skilled facilitator to support an atmosphere of safety, curiosity and connection. It will also drain energy from the group if the participants and facilitators must devote a large amount of attention, at the outset, to fundamental questions about purpose and commitment. Such a rough start also runs the risk of introducing tensions in the group that replicate some of the patterns of the "old conversation," for example, struggles over whose approach and voice is most valuable.

- 2) *The facilitator's role is to support the group in having the kind of conversation that they want to have.*

We do not try to talk anyone into participating. It takes hard work to engage in dialogue; the pull of the "old conversation" is strong. If people opt out of the dialogue because they are not ready or willing to do that work, we appreciate that they know themselves well enough to decline to participate. This exemplifies the third principle.

- 3) *All participation is voluntary.*

When someone declines to participate in a dialogue initiative or declines to answer a particular question within a dialogue session, no explanation or justification is necessary. We do not facilitate programs in which participants are required or pressured by a person of authority to attend.

The chart on the next page provides a brief summary of the various steps that PCP follows when it organizes and facilitates a dialogue program. It also lists some of the questions that we ask ourselves at each stage in order to figure out how we can best apply these principles. The remainder of this chapter explains more about each of these steps.

## 2.4 Typical Phases in PCP's Work

PHASE	SOME KEY QUESTIONS
<p><b>Explore the Proposed Initiative and Decide Whether to Move Forward</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is PCP's general approach to dialogue well suited to the goals of the conveners and potential participants?</li> <li>• Do we or they have concerns about timeline, resources, motivation or "ripeness"?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Map the Situation</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is the history of the conflict within the community, and how has the idea to have a dialogue developed?</li> <li>• How have people experienced conversations about the issues?</li> <li>• What do they hope to experience or achieve through dialogue?</li> <li>• What concerns do they have?</li> <li>• What ideas do they have about what should be planned and who should be involved in planning or convening?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Develop a Provisional Plan</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What should be offered? For example, should it be a single session, a series of sessions, a two-hour session, a full day, or a two-day retreat?</li> <li>• What should the group size and composition be?</li> <li>• What roles will be played by whom? Who will facilitate, convene, or host?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Invite and Engage with Participants</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What can we learn from pre-meeting interactions about participants' hopes, concerns, and ideas?</li> <li>• What needs to be communicated to participants about the purposes of the dialogue, what they can expect, and what will be asked of them?</li> <li>• How can our pre-meeting interactions help us, and the participants, to prepare to pursue the goals of the dialogue?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Finalize the Meeting Design</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What structures, questions and communication agreements will support the participants in achieving their purposes?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Facilitate the Meeting</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How can we best support the participants in having the sort of conversation they have said they want to have?</li> <li>• What shifts in plans might be required to be responsive to the evolving needs and interests of the participants?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Elicit Feedback and Achieve Closure or Plan Next Steps</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What can we learn about the participants' experiences that will help us to improve our practice generally and/or better serve them in a next phase?</li> <li>• What next steps, if any, should be taken, e.g., plans for future events or communications?</li> </ul>

## 2.5 Practices that Support Participant Ownership

The new conversation is a shared journey and a shared responsibility.

We believe that open and collaborative interactions between facilitators and participants encourage participants to share responsibility for the quality of the dialogue. Therefore, we invite input and collaboration not only in the early phase of planning a dialogue, but throughout the session, and through the process of collecting feedback and learning from the experience.

In most cases, this represents an intentional departure from “old conversations”—conversations in which participants often feel devalued and disempowered and tend to focus on what others should do to make things better rather than on what they can do to make a difference. The new conversation is a shared journey and a shared responsibility.

We foster participant ownership of their conversation in many ways, and in each phase of the work.

### **In the exploratory phase**

Before we commit to convene a dialogue, we talk with potential participants about their hopes, their level of interest and motivation, and the concerns they might bring to engaging in a dialogue. We explain that our role is to support them in achieving their goals.

### **In the process of inviting participants**

When inviting people to a dialogue, we clearly communicate the purposes of the dialogue, what our role will be, and what will be expected of them.

When we invite participants by letter we typically enclose a table contrasting dialogue and debate (see Appendix B). We also include a preview of the proposed communication agreements. We urge potential participants to contact us with any questions, concerns or specific wishes they have. Even if our only mechanism for inviting people is a flyer or newsletter article, we communicate as much as we can about the purpose and spirit of the event and invite people to contact us with questions or concerns. (See also Section 3.7 and Appendices G and H.)

*When inviting people to a dialogue, we clearly communicate the purposes of the dialogue, what our role will be, and what will be asked of them.*

### **In pre-meeting conversations**

We like to talk with participants before an initial dialogue session so that we can answer questions, ensure that the dialogue that we are offering matches their goals, and learn about the specific hopes and concerns of those who will attend. If we cannot talk with all of the participants directly, we try to learn whatever we can about the needs and wishes of people in the community. In some cases, we have extensive pre-meeting contact with participants and engage them as collaborators in the process of designing the session.

When we are able to talk with potential participants in advance of a dialogue session, we ask them to share something about the hopes and intentions they will bring to the conversation. We ask them to talk about both what they hope will happen in the dialogue (what they hope to “get” from the dialogue) and how they themselves hope to contribute. We follow up by asking how we as facilitators can help them to participate in the way they’d like to participate.

**A typical series of questions is:**

- 1) What are your hopes for the dialogue?
- 2) Can you tell us something about what you hope will happen, and what you hope you will experience?
- 3) How would you like to participate in the dialogue?
- 4) Think about any past experiences with conversations about difficult topics. What do you like about the way you've contributed to those conversations? Are there particular ways of communicating or acting that you'd like to avoid in this conversation?
- 5) Are there any positive ways of communicating or action that you'd like to emphasize?
- 6) How can we as facilitators help you to do that?

Asking these questions helps us to design a dialogue and to facilitate in a way that meets the participants' needs. At the same time, these questions help the participants to remember and commit to positive intentions and to prepare to put forth whatever effort will be needed.

If we cannot talk with the participants before the dialogue, we often ask some of these questions at the beginning of a dialogue session. When participants speak in the group about their intentions and about how they'd like to communicate, they re-affirm those intentions. They also present themselves as well-intentioned and willing to accept reminders if they slip into old ways of communicating about the issues.

**In the opening phase of the dialogue**

When participants gather for the dialogue, we remind them about the purpose that was stated in the invitation and we offer proposed agreements for their consideration. When participants have had an opportunity to consider the proposed agreements before deciding to attend, revisions to the proposed agreements, if requested at all, are usually handled quickly. Even when the agreements are not previewed, they are usually accepted with little or no revision.

**In the process of meeting design, facilitation, and follow up**

As facilitators, we adopt a transparent, curious and collaborative stance. During the dialogue, we typically explain why we are proposing to do things in a particular way and we invite input. We let participants know that we want them to be open with us about what is working or not working for them. During the meeting, we sometimes check in with participants to see whether we accurately understand their needs and wishes.

If we are unsure about whether to intervene, for example, because we don't know how a participant has experienced something that another participant has said, we don't make assumptions, we ask.

If we are unsure about whether to intervene, for example, because we don't know how a participant has experienced something that another participant has said, we don't make assumptions, we ask. In multi-session dialogues, we gather input at the end of a session that will help us to plan the next session. We often have phone calls between meetings to learn about what has or has not worked well for individual participants, and to elicit their ideas and wishes. After single-session dialogues we underscore our desire to learn from participants through an evaluation process, using feedback forms and, in some cases, through phone calls.

## 2.6 Building A Strong Container: Agreements and Structures

As described above, conversations on controversial issues are often fast-paced and strewn with powerful slogans, “hot button” words, and grand pronouncements about the beliefs, intentions, and values of whole groups of people. Listening is compromised when participants pay little attention to what is being said, and instead construct and rehearse their next comments. The atmosphere is likely to be filled with anxiety and antagonism. Speakers anticipate being criticized, dismissed, or being put on the spot. Those who are shy or need time to formulate their thoughts speak less frequently or not at all.

When designing a dialogue format, our task is to shape a context and atmosphere—to build a “container”—that counteracts all of these tendencies. Two key elements of a strong container are: (1) communication agreements and (2) structures for reflecting, speaking, and listening.

### 2.6.1 Communication Agreements

#### 2.6.1.1 A Basic Set of Proposed Agreements

When conflicts are polarized, we have found that agreements like those listed below (1) discourage old ritualized patterns of communication, and (2) create a respectful, safe environment in which participants can have a more intentional and personal exchange of ideas, experiences and questions. (These appear in handout form in Appendix J-1.)

Regarding the **spirit** of our speaking and listening:

- 1) We will speak for ourselves and allow others to speak for themselves. We will not expect ourselves or others to represent, defend, or explain an entire group.
- 2) We will not criticize the views of others or attempt to persuade them.
- 3) We will listen with resilience, “hanging in” when we hear something that is hard to hear.
- 4) If tempted to make attributions about the beliefs of others (e.g., “You just believe that because...”) we will instead, consider asking a question to check out the assumption we are making, (for example, “Do you believe that because...” or “What leads you to that belief?”).

Regarding the **form** of our speaking and listening:

- 5) We will participate within the time frames suggested by the facilitator.
- 6) We will not interrupt except to indicate that we cannot hear a speaker.
- 7) We will “pass” or “pass for now” if we are not ready or willing to respond to a question.

Regarding **confidentiality**:

- 8) When we discuss our experience here with people outside the group, we will not attach names or other identifying information to particular comments unless we have permission to do so.

The sample formats offered in Chapter 7 suggest agreements to propose. When you plan a dialogue you will need to determine whether there is a good fit between that set of the agreements and the circumstances in which you are working.

### 2.6.1.2 Clarifying the Purposes of These Agreements

Four of these agreements may raise questions with some participants if they are not explained or customized: the agreements about speaking for oneself, refraining from criticism and persuasion, resilient listening, and confidentiality.

#### Regarding Speaking for One's Self (#1)

“We will speak for ourselves and allow others to speak for themselves with no pressure to represent or explain a whole group.”

This agreement is likely to be clear and understandable to many people. However, some participants may see it as barring ways of participating that should be welcomed.

One purpose for this agreement is to remind people who play spokesperson roles in their daily life that in this dialogue they are not being asked to participate as a representative of other people. This agreement is not to restrict information, but rather to free up participants to share the full range of their questions, ideas, values, and commitments whether or not their constituents or colleagues would agree.

There are exceptions. Occasionally, someone will ask a participant for information about his or her organization. If the “old” includes a sense of mystery or suspicion about what an organization is “up to” or what it stands for, it will be “new” if someone from the organization responds directly to inquiries about it. It is important that such responders clarify that they are wearing an “information hat” at that moment.

The wording of this agreement may be problematic for those who feel that they do not always have the privilege of being seen by others as an individual. In these cases, speaking as part of a “people”—as a “we” rather than an “I”—may be a direct reflection of personal experience.

In this case, the agreement may be worded: “We will speak from our experience and from our hearts about what we care about, how we think, and who we are, and we’ll resist making large generalizations about other people’s experiences.” with an elaboration like:

“Speaking from your experience and from your heart may mean speaking about your group identity or your connectedness to a group. That’s fine. The purpose of this agreement is only to avoid large and rigid assertions like ‘Every person in my group would agree with me.’”

#### Regarding Criticism and Persuasion (#2)

We will not criticize the views of others or attempt to persuade them.”

Some people hear this as a request for “politeness.” They fear it will encourage people to set aside their passion or to tip toe around differences.

Such misunderstandings can be avoided with an elaboration such as: “Avoiding criticism does not require that you set aside strong feelings and passion. In fact, the purpose of the agreements is to create a safe place for you to express what you care about most deeply, but in a constructive and respectful way. This agreement allows you to speak passionately about your beliefs, values, and concerns without making negative or insulting comments about the beliefs, values, and concerns of others. You may say ‘I believe x and here’s why,’ but not ‘You’re stupid to think y and I’ll persuade you that I’m right and you’re wrong.’ Remember that you are aiming for mutual understanding, not agreement or conversion.”



### **Regarding Resilient Listening (#3)**

“We will listen with resilience, ‘hanging in there’ when something is hard to hear.”

A possible elaboration: “If you hear something that is very upsetting, don’t feel that you shouldn’t speak up. Just be thoughtful about how you speak up and try not to react hastily. If you hear something during the opening go-rounds that upsets you, it will be best if you make a note of it so you can talk about your response in the less structured part of the dialogue. When the session becomes more free form, if something is especially upsetting or insulting, feel free to say ‘ouch’ or give me a time-out signal so we can stop and discuss what was said and how you were affected by it. We can also see what the speaker meant or intended.”

### **Regarding Confidentiality (#8)**

“When we discuss our experience here with people outside the group, we will not attach names or other identifying information to particular comments unless we have permission to do so.”

Different circumstances warrant different approaches to confidentiality.

- In single-session groups in which many people are strangers to each other, we sometimes suggest a “lighter” confidentiality agreement: “If asked to keep something confidential, we will honor that request.”
- In groups whose members belong to the same community, we typically suggest a strong confidentiality agreement at the outset indicating that it can be loosened at the end of the dialogue if there is full agreement to do so.
- When a dialogue will better serve its purposes if participants are free to share what they learn with friends, family, colleagues, associates, we may suggest that there be no confidentiality agreement. In such a case, however, the group may decide to make either or both of the following agreements:
  - “When speaking outside of the group, we will share what we have learned in a manner that is respectful of the people in the dialogue and we will not use information ‘against’ another participant in another context.”
  - “Decisions about speaking to the press will be made by the full group (or in the case of a large group, by its designated steering committee). If media interviews are granted, they will be conducted in a manner that furthers the explicit shared goals of the dialogue group.”
- In a highly polarized, high stakes situation, participants may even want the fact of their participation in the dialogue to be held in strictest confidence.

### **A Cautionary Note About Elaboration:**

As you will see in the suggested formats in Chapter 7, there’s a fair amount that you’ll need to say before participants begin to talk with each other. Use your judgment about how much elaboration is necessary. If you take too much time, the participants may become impatient—and you’ll read about it on the participants’ feedback forms!

### 2.6.1.3 Additional Agreements That May Be Helpful

We offer here some additions to the list presented above that may be appropriate in the situation in which you are working.

- We often add an agreement to share time equitably during the less structured part of the dialogue.
- In a group that is likely to include some people with a somewhat imposing “authoritative” style of speaking, we might ask that people try to avoid “grand pronouncements” and, instead, connect what they know to their experiences, influences, specific sources of information, etc. This can be offered as an elaboration of agreement #1 on the list above.
- In ongoing groups, we ask participants to resist the urge to continue the discussion through e-mail. Even the forwarding of articles by e-mail can be problematic if others are inclined to make assumptions about why the sender passed them on. E-mail is best limited to scheduling and, perhaps, for informing each other about events of likely interest. (See Appendix J-2 for a sample set of agreements intended for multi-session groups.)
- When dialogues are likely to elicit stories about people in the community who are not in attendance (e.g., in the format presented in Section 7.1), we include the proposed agreement: “If, in our dialogue, we refer to other community members by name, we will speak about them with the same respect that we intend to show each other.” In some Jewish communities, participants may want to follow a strict interpretation of *Lashon Hara* (the prohibition of speaking ill of others) and agree not to mention the names of those who are not present at all. (See Appendix J-1.)
- If members of a longer-term group have decided that they are ready to self-facilitate, they may wish to make agreements about how they will share responsibility for the quality of the conversation. Appendix I offers tips for self-facilitating groups.

### 2.6.2 Structures for Reflecting, Speaking, and Listening

Structures for reflecting, speaking, and listening block old patterns and create space for new ways of being together.

The structure of a meeting is defined by a sequence of time segments, each associated with certain purposes and/or activities. A period of time when only one person may speak is a structure. A time for questions is a structure. A time to reflect in silence is a structure. A time for “less structured conversation” is also a structure.

Over the years we have learned to favor two structures: the go-round and the pause.

#### The Go-Round

As you will see in the sample formats in Chapter 7, in the early segment of dialogue sessions we frequently use this sequence, which we call a “go-round.”

- The facilitator poses a question and indicates how much time each person has to respond.
- The facilitator asks the group to pause before anyone responds to allow participants to collect their thoughts.
- The facilitator repeats the question.
- The facilitator designates the first speaker.

- Each participant is given an allotted time to speak. When he/she is done, the person at his/her right (or left) is given the next opportunity to talk—and so on, around the circle. Anyone who passes instead of speaking will be given a chance to speak when the others are done.

Fresh and constructive conversation often requires thoughtful pauses. Most moments of silence are anything but empty.

A variant of the go-round is the “popcorn” format. In this format, participants can speak in any order as they are ready.

### **The Pause**

The value of the pause is often under-appreciated by people who design and facilitate dialogues on divisive issues. Fresh and constructive conversation often requires thoughtful pauses. Most moments of silence are anything but empty.

A pause can serve many functions. It encourages reflection. It also encourages people to make their own distinctive, thoughtful contributions rather than merely offering reflex reactions to what others have said. Pauses also promote better listening. Most listeners can concentrate better when they know there will be a pause during which they can gather their thoughts.

In some situations, we ask participants to pause between speakers during a go-round so that everyone can take in and reflect on what the last speaker has said before the next speaker begins. This is especially helpful if we have explicitly asked participants to write down questions—if they have any—to ask each other later. Some people will be frustrated with long pauses between speakers. Few are frustrated, however, by pauses for reflection after a question has been asked.

## **2.7 Well-Crafted Questions**

“Old conversations” often involve people putting forth positions and offering arguments to support those positions. One way to invite a new conversation—one intended not for winning but for understanding—is to craft questions that ask people to:

- speak personally, rather than as a representative of a group
- shift from expressing positions to expressing underlying dreams, hopes, concerns and fears
- speak about uncertainties, complexities, and gray areas in their thinking, as well as what they know for sure
- share stories about ways in which their views, hopes and concerns may have been shaped by their life experience
- explore the meanings of buzz words or emotionally charged terms that have different meanings and connotations for different people
- encourage participants to reflect on the assumptions, values, and worldviews that underlie or shape their thinking—for example, assumptions about what information can be trusted, ideas about how happens, and worldviews related to the lessons of history

The questions we ask encourage participants to expand the range of experiences and information that they pay attention to and share with others.

The questions we ask encourage people to expand the range of experiences and information that they pay attention to and share with others. When participants speak from the full range of their thoughts and experiences, they begin to listen more fully to each other, they become genuinely interested in each other, and they develop greater trust in each other.

The questions we ask also lead participants to reflect in new ways on their own perspectives. When the armor required for debate is discarded—and when people set aside a mindset that searches for ways to support their own arguments and undermine the arguments of others—they gain understanding, not only about others, but also about themselves.

When we consider posing a question, we usually check to make sure that it is:

- open-ended, not amenable to “yes” or “no” answers
- non-rhetorical
- not leading or biased
- unlikely to reinforce unhelpful dichotomies

You can find a number of examples of questions that are designed for these purposes in Chapter 7.

## **2.8 Facilitation that is Responsive to Participants’ Purposes and Needs**

The collaborative, transparent and responsive spirit that we bring to our pre-meeting work carries through all phases of our work. We see our role as facilitators as one of service.

The collaborative, transparent, and responsive spirit that we bring to our pre-meeting work carries through all phases of our work. Our role as facilitators is to serve the group. Together with the participants, we seek effective ways for them to achieve their goals. When we intervene, we do it with:

- humility (not assuming that we are correct in our interpretation of what is or isn’t working)
- compassion (not shaming those who need reminders about the agreements)
- legitimacy (our interventions are grounded in the agreements that the participants have made with each other about how they will communicate and about the purpose of the conversation)

For more on the role of the facilitator, see Section 3.3. For tips on facilitating, see Chapter 6.



## 3. Pre-Meeting Explorations and Decisions

Good things can come from many different kinds of dialogue. The Public Conversations Project (PCP) and the Jewish Dialogue Group (JDG) have led both one-time and multiple session programs, with groups of many different kinds, in a variety of settings.

This chapter will help you to decide what kind of dialogue makes sense in your situation. It will lead you through figuring out who to invite, how to invite them, and how to work with the potential participants to create a program that addresses their needs. It will also help you to decide who should facilitate, where the dialogue should be held, whether you should have one session or multiple sessions, and how long the sessions should last.

### 3.1 Considering the Possibilities: Types of Dialogues and Roles to Play

#### 3.1.1 What kinds of dialogue programs have been conducted successfully?

##### Community Groups and “Stranger” Groups

Many dialogue programs are designed to meet the needs of specific synagogues, organizations, schools, or communities. These programs are planned in collaboration with leaders of those communities who are sensitive to the particular needs and hopes of the community. Other dialogue programs bring together a collection of individuals who may or may not know one another; what connects the group is a desire to participate in dialogue with other Jews on this topic.

##### Public Outreach and Individual Invitation

Some dialogues are open only to individuals who are invited personally, while others are open to the public and advertised widely. Some have a blend of public and private elements, for example, they are initiated through public outreach then planned carefully with a particular group of people who have responded to the outreach.

##### Full Community and Subset of a Community

In some situations, the aim is to bring together a large portion of the community. In other situations, a small group of people who have a need, desire, or particular purpose are brought together. For example, a committee within a synagogue might have a dialogue, or an ad hoc subgroup might serve as a pilot group for a larger community-wide dialogue.

##### Single Organization and Multiple Organizations

JDG sometimes conducts dialogues that bring together people from two or more groups. These may be relatively open, or very private. In one case, two synagogues in the same town held a joint program, inviting all of their members to attend. In another case, activists on different sides of a key issue came together for a small dialogue program. This program included just a handful of people, from a number of different organizations, who wanted to get to know people from “the other side” so that they could find ways to deal with their differences more constructively.

### **Single-Session and Multiple-Session**

A single-session dialogue offers people an opportunity to try out dialogue without making a long-term commitment. For some people, it serves as an “appetizer” for more in depth dialogue. Multiple session dialogues offer an opportunity for people to delve deeper and explore issues more broadly with people who develop increasing trust and understanding over time.

The suggestions in this chapter are geared especially toward planning dialogues that take place within individual synagogues, schools, or organizations, but they are relevant to dialogues of all different kinds.

### **3.1.2 What are the different roles that I, and others, can play?**

There are a number of tasks and roles that can be played by one person or by different people who collaborate with each other.

#### **Convening**

The convener or conveners invite the participants and often handle the logistics of the event. Conveners are generally known and respected by the potential participants. Typically, conveners are also participants, though they need not be. Sometimes the convening function is played by a planning group that consists of a subset of a larger participant group.

#### **Facilitating**

The facilitator or co-facilitators guide participants through the process during the dialogue. The facilitator’s responsibilities are described in Section 3.3.

#### **Pre-Meeting Work, Meeting Design, and Follow-up**

These tasks are often done by the facilitators in collaboration with the conveners and participants.

## **3.2 Initial Exploration**

### **3.2.1 How are dialogues usually initiated?**

Dialogues are initiated in many ways. For example, a member of a community or network, feeling the time is ripe for a dialogue on a polarized issue, may start the process by talking with a potential convener of the dialogue. The convener and/or the community member may then recruit facilitators with whom they can evaluate the prospects for a dialogue, and if the situation seems promising, proceed to design it together.

Alternatively, a facilitator may open conversations with potential conveners and/or others who are knowledgeable about a particular controversy. Sometimes a community leader who is prepared to convene a dialogue starts by recruiting a facilitator. The convener may remain highly involved as a partner in planning the dialogue, or may recruit a planning committee to work with the facilitator. (See Section 3.3 for detailed role descriptions of facilitators and conveners.)

The JDG sometimes organizes public dialogue sessions on its own, without the involvement of another convener, publicizing them widely through newspaper listings, mass e-mails flyers, and other means.

### **3.2.2 Where should I start in thinking about what to offer, to whom, and why?**

You can start with any of these questions. All three answers are important, but what's most important is how the individual answers fit with each other.

Does the sort of program that you are prepared to offer fit with the wishes and concerns of the potential participants? Does a particular statement of purpose or goals, and a particular event and format, address those wishes and concerns? When considering who should be involved, think about both the participants and your own role. Do you see yourself as a potential convener, co-convener, and/or facilitator? Again, you will face a question of "fit." (See Section 3.3 on the facilitator and convener roles.)

### **3.2.3 What do I need to find out before I decide what to offer, or if I should proceed at all?**

In PCP's work, our early exploration (sometimes called "mapping") generally involves asking about:

#### **The Participants' Goals and Motivation**

What motivates potential participants to try a new kind of conversation? What do they hope to experience or learn? What harm is caused by the usual conversations, or the lack of conversations? What kinds of loss or frustration are they experiencing? What gives them hope that things can be different? What risks might be involved?

#### **History**

How have members of the community discussed the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the past? Have other dialogue efforts been made in this community? If so, what happened? What went well? What didn't go so well? How do they understand the successes and failures of those efforts? Are there different opinions about how the conversation has gone in the past? Who else would you need to talk to in order to hear multiple perspectives?

#### **Organizational Life**

If the dialogue is to be offered as a program of a particular organization or synagogue, whose support or wisdom should you seek? Who are the leaders whose support would be crucial or especially helpful? Are there committees that you ought to coordinate with before launching a dialogue initiative? Whom should you consult first, if only as a matter of courtesy?

#### **Politics and Power**

Do community members with different political perspectives have different goals or motivations for the dialogue? Is one subgroup comfortable with the way the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is discussed in the community, and another group dissatisfied? Are there people in the community who feel particularly valued or shut-out? What are the consequences of these differences? Who feels them? Who cares about them?

#### **Roles**

What role can you play, with skill and credibility, in this setting? What roles will others need to play? Are you in a position to identify potential participants—as a "convener" of the dialogue—but perhaps not in a good position to facilitate? Are you a potential facilitator in need of a convener or conveners? Can you play both roles?

### 3.2.4 Who should I talk with to learn these things?

*Seek early input from people who have varied perspectives on how these issues have been discussed, or avoided, in the past.*

Begin by talking with people who may need or want to be involved in convening the dialogue, or who may be in a good position to support a dialogue effort, such as community leaders. (See Section 3.3 for guidance on working with conveners.) In addition, seek early input from people who have varied perspectives on how these issues have been discussed, or avoided, in the past. Be sure that you not only inquire about the possible benefits of dialogue,

but also about concerns about dialogue. If a community leader expresses reservations, be sure to find out if you should take those reservations as a request not to proceed, or just an indication that she has a limited personal interest in being involved.

### 3.2.5 How extensive should my explorations or “mapping” be?

How extensively and formally you will need to “map” the community will depend upon many factors, including:

- how much you already know about the community
- how much its members trust you
- how emotionally charged the divisions are
- how high the stakes are for this kind of conversation

If the participants are strangers to each other and likely to remain strangers, the stakes are lower than if they are members of a close-knit community that has experienced serious tensions.

### 3.2.6 How can my way of interacting with people before the dialogue contribute to the success of the dialogue?

Pre-meeting conversations—whether at the stage of early exploration, collaborative planning, or pre-meeting conversations with participants—are not only sources of important information, but also opportunities to model a spirit of inquiry and openness. Seek to interact with others in the same way that you would like to see participants interact with each other: Speak and listen with care, curiosity, and appreciation. Offer your skills generously but be humble and open to new ideas. And if what you learn suggests that conditions are not right for dialogue, thank people for their time and candor and let it go.



### 3.2.7 How can I determine if conditions are ripe for dialogue?

Sometimes early explorations raise questions about whether the time or situation is right for planning a dialogue. We urge you to pay close attention to these doubts. Remember that it is a privilege to work with people in a way that encourages open, authentic speaking on divisive topics. It is also a great responsibility. Adopt the Hippocratic Oath: “*First, do no harm.*” If a dialogue is planned or facilitated poorly, it might reinforce stereotypes and intensify anger or despair. It might also lead participants to reject invitations to be part of future dialogues.

We look for several indicators that a situation is ripe for a meaningful dialogue to take place. If any of the following conditions is not present, we would consider not proceeding:

- 1) *You can bring together a group that is balanced, motivated, and relevant in relation to the specific controversy.*

If a community is polarized and only one “side” shows up to pursue mutual understanding, they may make negative assumptions about why the others didn’t come (e.g., “See how close-minded they are?” “See how they don’t care if we feel marginalized?”). This is not to suggest that large differences of perspective are always necessary (See Section 3.6.2). If key participants in a particular controversy are interested but unable to commit adequate time, consider waiting.

- 2) *Community leaders with varied perspectives have indicated that they will provide material and non-material support for the dialogue effort, or at least not undermine it.*

This can include people with formal leadership positions as well as other influential community members.

- 3) *Distractions related to other controversies or tensions are absent or minimal.*

If the community is pre-occupied with difficult decisions, traumatic events, or unrelated controversies, participants may have a hard time staying focused on the topic and goals of the dialogue. In this case, it may be best to wait or to design a dialogue on the issues that are most pressing.

- 4) *The skills, commitments, credibility, and collaborative spirit of those involved in convening and facilitating the dialogue match the challenges of the particular situation.*

If the community is very divided and the stakes are high, it is prudent to proceed only with credible conveners and/or planning team members who are prepared to invest sufficient time and thought in their role and skillful, collaborative facilitators who are prepared to engage in sufficient pre-meeting conversations and planning.

### 3.2.8 What are the signs that a convener is unlikely to provide to provide adequate support for a dialogue?

The most common ways in which conveners are not adequately supportive are

- They allot too little time to plan, invite participants, and/or otherwise contribute to the dialogue itself. (“We want to have a dialogue next Wednesday. We are prepared to set aside an hour and fifteen minutes for the event.”)
- They don’t put enough effort into outreach or, at the other extreme, they pressure people to attend. (“I’ll let the Board know that I expect them all to be there.”)
- They under-fund the initiative.

## 3.3 Deciding Who Will Convene and/or Facilitate

### 3.3.1 What is the role of the facilitator(s)?

If you are the facilitator, your over-arching objective will be to help participants have the conversation they want to have. As indicated above, this usually involves pre-meeting work. Once people have gathered, your basic tasks will be to:

- welcome participants and orient them to the event and its purpose
- ask the participants to make some communication agreements with each other
- start the dialogue by posing a question or a series of questions, then help the group transition to a less structured conversation
- remind participants about their agreements if they forget them
- move the group through the dialogue, keeping an eye on time and on the atmosphere, and raising questions for the group if the spirit of the dialogue is being compromised, even if you’re unsure how what is happening relates to the agreements
- end the session in a way that helps participants to feel a sense of completion, and, if relevant, address next steps

*If the purpose is clear and the participants have made agreements that will help them pursue that purpose, the demands on the facilitator are usually minimal.*

If the purpose is clear and the participants have made agreements that will help them pursue that purpose, the demands on the facilitator are usually minimal. The structure and agreements “hold” the conversation. How active you will need to be as a facilitator will depend on the particular group. Some groups or individual participants need a great deal of time management; others do not. Some will need reminders about the spirit of dialogue; others will not. Remember that your duties do not include mind reading! If you’re not sure about what your group needs at a particular juncture, don’t feel that you need to guess. Ask them. (Chapter 6 offers detailed guidance about facilitation.)

### **3.3.2 What is the role of the convener(s)?**

The convener or conveners invite people and host the event. They typically also participate in the event, though this isn't necessary. In some cases, the facilitators convene the dialogue themselves, but very often these roles are played by different people.

How much involvement you will need from a convener will depend on the circumstances. The many roles that conveners can play are listed below. Conveners' effectiveness in playing these roles depends on how trusted they are by potential participants, how knowledgeable they are about the community and its history, and how interested they are in the dialogue.

#### **Early explorations and decisions**

The conveners can collaborate with you to ensure that the dialogue's stated purposes and its basic parameters (for example, single or multiple session, evening session or half-day session, time, location) are well-suited to the community. They can offer their own perspectives on the community, its history and its needs, and help you determine if there are others with whom you should talk before going forward with a particular purpose, format, place, and date.

#### **Logistics**

The conveners can make arrangements for a suitable date and space, and make supplies and refreshments available.

#### **Outreach and invitations**

The conveners sometimes give the facilitator names of people who they think might want to attend the dialogue. The facilitator then follows up with those individuals. Sometimes the conveners put out the word about the dialogue and ask people who are interested to contact them or the facilitator to learn more. In some cases, a convener will call potential participants to ask if they are interested and then follow up with written invitations. Sometimes the facilitator sends the invitations, indicating that the conveners thought they might be interested. In either case, the convener and facilitator should work together to draft the invitation in order to ensure that it accurately reflects both people's ideas about what is being offered.

#### **Other pre-meeting work**

In most cases, you will want to be the one to have pre-meeting phone calls with participants. The conveners can help with this process by setting up phone appointments. If you are not planning to make pre-meeting calls to all participants, the conveners can help you by calling invitees to remind them of the time and place, ask if they have any questions, and, if they haven't yet RSVP'd, confirm that they plan to attend. (Be sure to instruct the convener not to pressure anyone to attend.) During these calls, the convener can remind invitees that they are welcome to call the facilitator with questions or concerns. If the convener will also be a participant, it is best not to expect him or her to address another participant's personal concerns in any detail.

#### **Collaborating on meeting design**

The conveners can provide input about the design of the meeting. In some cases, the conveners and facilitators brainstorm together about meeting design. In others, the facilitator creates a draft design and asks the conveners to suggest revisions.

### **Offering welcoming words in the session**

In many dialogue programs, a convener offers welcoming remarks at the beginning of the first session and then introduces the facilitator. This is especially helpful if the facilitator is not well known in the community. The convener may also want to offer words of appreciation at the end. Aside from such acts of hospitality, in the dialogue room, the convener should be on equal footing with other participants, and should be treated no differently by the facilitator.

### **Assisting with possible next steps**

The conveners can also help with any next steps the group might wish to undertake. For example, if a dialogue group decides to move on from dialogue to an educational program, the conveners can offer to plan that program, or they can “hand off” the idea to others who will follow up.

### **3.3.3 Who usually plays the role of convener?**

Conveners are typically people who are trusted and respected by potential participants—for example, a synagogue’s rabbi, the president of an organization, or the chair of a committee. Often two conveners work together, or a planning committee that includes people with diverse perspectives teams up to convene a dialogue.

In some communities, it may be difficult to find one person who is both respected personally and not readily associated with a particular perspective. In that case, it is best to work with a set of conveners or a diverse planning committee. JDG and PCP often work with planning committees that include three to six members.

Facilitators sometimes convene dialogue sessions themselves, taking on both roles at once.

### **3.3.4 Can a convening group evolve out of a pilot dialogue group?**

Yes. JDG sometimes begins by holding a dialogue with a pilot group of “opinion leaders.” After an initial session or sessions, these opinion leaders are likely to share their experience with others and then help to recruit participants for a more comprehensive community—wide program. Sometimes the pilot group turns into a planning committee.

### **3.3.5 What are the advantages of planning the dialogue together with a convener?**

Collaborative planning ensures a good fit between what is offered, who is in the room, and the needs and hopes of the larger community. In addition, working collaboratively helps people in the community to develop the skills and the confidence to plan and facilitate future dialogue initiatives on this issue or other divisive issues.

### 3.3.6 What forms of collaboration work well?

In many cases, it will be ideal for a facilitator who is not directly involved in the community to collaborate with a planning team or convener from within the community.

Conveners or planners from within the community can ensure that what is offered is a good fit for the community. They probably will have answers to many of the questions posed above about the community's history with regard to conversations about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. They will understand the group's culture and ways of operating. For example, they can effectively spread the word, collect RSVPs, and schedule the dialogue to avoid conflicts with other events. Also, they may have good intuitions about organizational and relational issues—for example, about what role the rabbi or synagogue president should play, if any, in supporting the idea of dialogue and/or directly participating.

An outside facilitator who has worked with other groups can bring a breadth of experience and a broad perspective on what has worked well or not well in other dialogues. Moreover, in most cases, the participants will not know an outside facilitator's personal views.

We do not mean to suggest that an outside facilitator is necessary. Many communities have members who are capable of facilitating with skill and even-handedness, credible as facilitators, and willing to play that role for a group. We strongly recommend, however, that facilitators do not attempt to play a dual role of facilitator/participant. At least in the early stages of a group's dialogue, it is advisable to have at least one person whose ways of listening to and interacting with the group are solely rooted in a commitment to serving the group.

### 3.3.7 Who can play the role of facilitator with credibility?

Credibility is in the eye of the beholder. If the participants are aware of the personal views of the facilitator, they may worry about whether the facilitator will facilitate even handedly, even if he is capable of doing so. You will be seen as a credible facilitator if you are seen as (1) not highly associated with a position and/or (2) skilled enough in the art of facilitation to set aside your own political views in order to facilitate fairly. If your political views are well known, even if you feel capable of even-handed facilitation, we recommend that you balance the team with a co-facilitator who has different views.

Your credibility is likely to be compromised if you present your own political views to the participants. If you want to earn and maintain credibility, we recommend that you avoid talking about your views with the participants before, during, or after the session, and avoid wearing any clothing or accessories that might signal what your political views are. Be careful to avoid even general comments that can be interpreted as expressions of opinion about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict or related issues.

*You do not have to lack strong convictions about the issue in order to be a good facilitator. You simply have to be able to put aside your own feelings and treat each participant equally, with genuine respect and concern.*

Keep in mind that most facilitators have strong opinions and feelings about at least some aspect of this issue—and other issues that might be a focus of a dialogue. You do not have to lack strong convictions about the issue order to be a good facilitator. You simply have to be able to put aside your own feelings and treat each participant equally, with genuine respect and concern.

### 3.3.8 What if I'm asked about my own political views?

If the conveners, potential participants, or anyone else associated with a dialogue program ask you to talk with them about your own views on the conflict, it is best to explain briefly that in order to perform your role effectively, you have to avoid sharing your own perspective. JDG facilitators often say something like, “We all have personal points of view, but in order to be effective, even-handed facilitators, we set them aside and focus on doing our job as facilitators.”

### 3.3.9 How can I tell if I am ready to facilitate?

If you are considering whether or not you should facilitate a particular dialogue and feel uncertain that you are ready, see the section of this guide about skills and supports (1.5), the suggestions about preparing yourself to facilitate in Chapter 5, and the facilitation tips in Chapter 6. If you read Chapter 6 and imagine that you would be too uncertain or shy to intervene in the manner suggested, you may not be ready to facilitate, except perhaps with a co-facilitator who can serve as a mentor for you.

### 3.3.10 What are the advantages and disadvantages of working with a co-facilitator?

Co-facilitation has many advantages:

#### **Credibility**

Co-facilitators with different backgrounds will likely offer different kinds of credibility and comfort to the group in terms of religion (see Section 3.3.11), age, gender, connections in the community, etc. If the participants are worried that a facilitator's political views will lead them to be biased, we recommend that you do your best to balance your team with facilitators who hold different views.

#### **Attention to different levels of the dialogue**

When you work in a team, while one facilitator is “on” as the person posing questions or making comments, the other can pay attention to broader group dynamics that the person in the lead role might not notice.

#### **Handling the unexpected**

When there are two or more facilitators, one of you will be available to handle latecomers and other unexpected situations, like a visitor who shows up at the door looking for a different meeting, or a gathering next door that turns out to be a marching band practice, with trumpets and drums!

#### **Learning and support**

People with different backgrounds and skills can learn a lot from one another and develop heightened self-awareness. No one enters the facilitation role as a “generic” facilitator. We all have identities and experiences that shape what we hear and notice and how we respond. It is easy to miss these influences if we don't receive honest feedback from others. As discussed in Section 1.5, if you expect to do this work as an ongoing activity, we strongly recommend that you build up a network of facilitators with different skills and backgrounds who can provide mutual support, brainstorm about ways to handle challenges, and give each other feedback and consultation. See also Section 5.1 on emotional preparation and team-building.

### **Complementary skills**

Your skill sets and preferences may be complementary. For example, one of you may feel most secure playing the lead role in a segment of the dialogue that is fairly well scripted while the other loves the challenge of facilitating the less structured portion of the dialogue.

There are also potential *disadvantages* to working with a co-facilitator:

You and a potential co-facilitator could have similar strengths and weaknesses, incompatible theoretical approaches to the work, or clashing hopes for how you will work together! Be sure to discuss these issues with a potential co-facilitator before you commit to working together. (See Section 5.1 on team-building.)

### **3.3.11 Should the facilitator(s) be Jewish?**

Many of the people who facilitate dialogue among Jews about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict are themselves Jewish. Some are not. Being a Jewish facilitator can lend credibility and comfort because participants probably can expect some degree of shared values and knowledge. On the other hand, being neither Jewish nor Muslim nor Arab can also enhance comfort. A facilitator who is not part of any of these groups may be viewed as less emotionally or politically involved. In addition, sometimes non-Jewish facilitators are appreciated for caring about a community and a problem that is not usually seen as “theirs.”

The question of credibility with the people in the room is crucial. Who will this group trust to hear them as they wish to be heard? Who can provide a “safe enough” environment for their airing of fears, ambivalence, anger, frustration and confusion?

If you are a non-Jew who wants to do this work, you should be somewhat knowledgeable about Judaism, Jewish history, the history of the conflict, and ways that anti-Semitism has been experienced not only by Jews at other times and places, but here and now. You should also find ways to examine your own feelings and attitudes, perhaps with a friend who can offer you a safe place to address any concerns or difficulties that may arise.

No matter what your background is, it will influence how you experience the dialogue. You cannot discard your identity and experience. You should simply pay attention to how it affects your work with the group. Working in a team with people who have different identities will give you a good opportunity to learn more about yourself. We encourage you and your co-facilitators to give and receive honest feedback and to explore with genuine curiosity the differences in your ideas and feelings about the dialogue.

*No matter what your background is, it will influence how you experience the dialogue. You cannot discard your identity and experience.*

### **3.3.12 Can I both participate and facilitate at the same time?**

We strongly recommend that you NOT try to play both roles. If you decide to combine the facilitator and participant role, however, you should be:

- willing and able to ask another person, perhaps a co-facilitator, to facilitate while you are participating, holding you to the same agreements as other participants
- willing to concern yourself more with the impact of your participation on the group's trust in you than on your full expressiveness
- willing to discontinue or curtail your participant role if the group needs your full attention

We also recommend that you establish from the start the importance of the participants sharing responsibility for the quality of the conversation. If you anticipate playing a dual role, you might use the "Self-Help Tools" presented in Appendix I.

Some facilitators participate in the introductory and closing go-rounds, but not in the body of the dialogue where the dual role is most likely to be a strain or a complicating factor for participants. This allows them to be known personally in the group without sharing their views about the substantive issues.



## 3.4 Deciding What to Offer

### 3.4.1 When working in a particular community, how should I decide whether to start with a dialogue for the whole community or with a sub-group or “pilot” group?

This will depend on what you have learned about the community and its needs, and also on the amount of time and resources you have available. Some key considerations include:

- *the number of people who are significantly concerned about the issue, or directly involved in the particular controversy that has prompted the dialogue*

If the dialogue has been prompted by particular controversy in the community, and only a subset of the community has been involved in it, a large, broadly based dialogue is not necessarily better.

- *what the old patterns are*

If a central part of the “old” pattern of communicating on the issue is lack of inclusion, it may be desirable to start off by including the whole community. If, however, part of the “old” pattern is that there is too much pressure for everyone to be involved in “processing everything,” you can ask some individuals or a small planning group to help you develop a clear understanding of who wants or needs to be involved in dialogue, and what they hope to achieve. Similarly, if part of the “old” pattern of communicating about the issue is lack of transparency, it will be important to be very open about where the idea for the dialogue came from, how it was planned, and possibly, to include the whole community in the initial event.

- *whether or not adequate resources are available to plan and facilitate a large program*

A community wide dialogue will require a larger facilitation team, more planning time, and greater outreach and recruitment efforts.

- *whether or not you have adequate time and resources to conduct a two-stage program, with pilot dialogue and then a community-wide dialogue*

Pilot dialogues usually enhance the effectiveness of a larger, broader dialogue by giving the facilitators and conveners an opportunity to try out and then fine-tune a format. Participants in a successful pilot can help you to revise the format, offer testimonials, and help you recruit additional participants for a larger dialogue. However, it takes more time and energy to conduct a two-stage initiative.

### 3.4.2 How should I choose between offering a single-session or a multi-session dialogue?

This choice involves making a trade-off between the depth of substantive exploration and the breadth of effective outreach. A series will allow for a much fuller conversation, in which people build their relationships over time. On the other hand, a one-time event will allow you to reach a larger number of people, including people who, for a variety of reasons, may be reluctant to commit to a series.

Single-session dialogues about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict can be very successful. At the same time, they can also be challenging. The conflict has a complex history, and people who care about it often have much to say about their viewpoints, values, life experiences, commitments, and questions. Participants are likely

to come with multiple layers of experience and feelings related to Israel, different levels of basic knowledge about Israel's cultural, political, and religious history, and different ways of understanding particular terms (for example, "Zionism"). It's hard to go deeply into the issues in only one session, especially if it is an evening session.

Most evening events are allotted no more than two or two-and-a-half hours. Especially on a weeknight, most people have a hard time getting to an event before 6:30 PM or staying later than 9:30. (We have found that college students often prefer to meet a bit later, however.)

Two hours is generally the minimum amount of time required for a group of six to eight people to have an experience that includes all of the following: (1) settling in, and being welcomed and oriented in a relaxed way; (2) introducing themselves to one another personally; (3) two to three minutes for each participant to respond to each of two or three questions; (4) thirty minutes of less structured conversation about questions and issues that have surfaced in the opening go-rounds; and (5) wrapping up the evening with reflections and, when relevant, discussion about next steps. It is especially hard to fit all this into a shorter meeting on a topic as complicated and potentially divisive as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Nevertheless, it's quite possible to have a very satisfying dialogue experience in one evening. JDG has convened many successful one-session dialogues for many different kinds of groups. The experience of a single session gives enough of a taste of the dialogue experience to help people decide if they would like to make a larger commitment to an ongoing group or a multi-session program.

Sample formats for single-session and multi-session dialogues are presented in Chapter 7.

### **3.4.3 In multi-session dialogues, what are the advantages and disadvantages of specifying the number of sessions before the program begins?**

There are many advantages:

- People may be willing to commit to four or five sessions but reluctant to sign on to an open-ended series.
- Many people will feel more committed to each session when they have agreed at the outset to attend all of those sessions.
- By specifying a time at which participants will decide whether to continue, both participants and facilitators can more easily maintain focus during the series and not deflect their energy with a meeting-by-meeting reassessment of whether to continue.
- If some group members propose to continue to meet after the last session, each person will have the opportunity to decide freely whether or not to renew his or her participation. This ensures that people who continue do so with fresh and informed commitment and not with a sense of obligation.
- If two or three people choose not to continue after the first set of meetings, the remaining participants can consider whether to recruit additional members for another set of meetings. If there is no clear time for participants to re-commit or leave, such planning is not possible.

### **3.4.4 What are the advantages and disadvantages of public dialogue programs (vs. programs for people who are connected with each other through organizations or other important relationships)?**

Public events can be a good way to introduce the concept of dialogue into a community, and the sample format in Section 7.1 works well for this purpose.

JDG has held many one-time public sessions as way to give people a small sample of the experience of dialogue. Many participants in these sessions have later gone on to help organize more intensive dialogues in their synagogues, schools, and organizations, or to volunteer with JDG in a variety of ways.

These sessions generally require less time and effort to plan than other kinds of dialogues. Public dialogues with strangers involve fewer risks than dialogues with members of the same group, or with people who have other significant relationships with another. When the participants have important pre-existing relationships with one another, it is important to plan with a great deal of care so that you minimize the chance that those relationships may be harmed. If a community has been in conflict over the issues to be discussed, it is even more important to plan carefully.

Public dialogues can be challenging to plan or facilitate in other ways, however. You usually don't know for certain who will attend and you are unlikely to have much pre-meeting contact with the participants. Therefore, you often won't know how well informed the participants are about the event, how many will show up, and what the range or balance of their perspectives will be. Some of JDG's open sessions have turned out to be very engaging and useful for the participants, and others have fallen somewhat flat.

### **3.4.5 Is it helpful to narrow the focus to a particular divisive sub-issue in a one-session dialogue?**

Actually, the opposite is true. It usually does not work well to organize a one-time event that focuses closely on a particular divisive issue. When designing a single-session event we recommend that you offer participants an opportunity to learn in an open-ended way about each other's experiences, feelings, and questions, and to reflect on their own. Single-session dialogues of this type can provide a good jumping-off point for a multi-session program that addresses more specific controversies.

Some synagogues have asked JDG to facilitate a one-time dialogue session about an issue like the Gaza disengagement, the separation barrier in the West Bank, or a divisive advocacy campaign that is happening in their community. JDG generally declines, explaining that they think it is important for people to talk first in a more personal and broad way, before addressing these specific controversies. They ask the group to try out an open-ended conversation, even if just as an experiment. Most groups have been willing to take this suggestion and have found the kind of dialogue that they offer very useful.

During the less structured portion of a single session or an opening session of a series, the participants might hone in on one or two topics. That is fine. We recommend only that you not begin with a narrowly defined divisive issue.

*When participants take on the most specific issues, they usually will do so more constructively if they have had time to get to know each other's personal stories and background and if they have built some trust with each other.*

When participants take on specific, difficult issues, they usually will do so more constructively if they have had time to get to know each other's personal stories and background and if they have built some trust with each other. This is most likely to happen if they have time to speak personally about the broader situation in which narrower issues are embedded.

## **3.5 Time, Space, and Food**

### **3.5.1 How long should the dialogue take?**

With six participants, the formats presented in Chapter 7 will take about two hours. The format offered in Section 7.2 for an opening session in a series may take a little longer, as will adaptations of the formats for use with large groups (see Section 4.4). Allow extra time if you plan to include additional elements, for example, fuller introductions, opening comments from a convener (perhaps with a reading or prayer), or a potentially complex discussion about next steps.

Even if these conditions do not pertain, we suggest scheduling the dialogue for two and half hours, if possible, because groups are likely to take about fifteen minutes to arrive, settle in, get refreshments, etc. Having a generous amount of time allows for a more relaxed atmosphere. It also allows more time for the less structured part of the conversation; when that part of the conversation is not allowed at least twenty minutes, some participants may feel that they didn't engage in "real dialogue."

If you are concerned that the dialogue will be rushed, consider setting aside some time before the official starting time of the dialogue. JDG's invitations frequently include language like, "Refreshments will be available at 6:30; the dialogue will start promptly at 7:00." If you are working with a two hour limit, you may also need to reduce the number of go-rounds, the time allotted to each person to respond in go-rounds, or the time reserved for less structured conversation.

### **3.5.2 What if I only have one hour?**

We strongly recommend that you do not try to squeeze the formats presented in Chapter 7 into less than two hours. If you want to design something much shorter, see Section 4.2.4.

### **3.5.3 Where should I hold the dialogue?**

Any place that is accessible to all, free from distractions, and has furnishings that are comfortable and flexible enough in their arrangement that everyone will be able to see each other. A circle of chairs works well; chairs around a rectangular conference table do not work well.

Single-session dialogues are often held in a community space, e.g., a meeting room in a synagogue. Groups that meet for several sessions sometimes choose to rotate to different members' homes. This works especially well if the group wants to begin with a potluck dinner and build personal relationships.

When we have preceded dialogues with a dinner or another sort of social gathering, we've found it ideal—

though not necessary—to have different rooms for the dinner and the dialogue. Physically entering a different, quiet space for the dialogue seems to help people to switch gears and prepare to have a slower, more reflective conversation. See Section 4.4 if you will be working with a large group and small break-out groups. See Section 5.2 for more on room set-up.

### **3.5.4 What about food? How well does a dinner-dialogue work?**

Refreshments are usually appreciated and they are often a part of the “culture” of coming together in a community. Often some beverages and light snacks will be enough—coffee, tea, juice, and a tray of cookies and crackers. You can offer them as the participants arrive, and allow some time for people to chat as they eat. As indicated in 4.4.1, making refreshments available at the end of the dialogue also has benefits, especially for large groups.

Offering a full meal (either a potluck or a meal put together in advance) involves more work and expense but it has two benefits.

First, it allows for the possibility of getting started earlier, thus relieving some time pressure. During dinner, participants can introduce themselves in a leisurely way, without discussing their views on the conflict.<sup>3</sup> Then, when the dialogue begins, there will be no need for an introductory go-round. (This can work especially well on a weekday evenings. You can schedule a dinner from 6 until 6:45, and then a dialogue from 6:45 until 9pm.)

Second, “breaking bread together” can serve as a warm and welcoming way to begin a group experience, and it gives people a chance to get to know one another, if they don’t already.

## **3.6 Group Size and Composition**

### **3.6.1 What’s the ideal number of participants?**

While we often work with groups of five to seven, there is no perfect group size. You will need to consider how much time you have to work with, what kind of experience the participants hope for, and what kind of exchange will fulfill the purposes of the dialogue.

For a single-session dialogue that uses one of the formats presented in Chapter 7, six people is an ideal size. Groups of seven or eight are likely to include a greater diversity of views. Groups of four or five are generally easier to facilitate and more relaxed in terms of time management. Larger groups can be accommodated by dividing them into smaller sub-groups, each with its own facilitator (see Section 4.4).

<sup>3</sup> At PCP, we preceded our dialogues about abortion with a dinner and asked participants to introduce themselves at dinner without reference to their views on the issue. The participants, who had not met each other before, told us that this was helpful in softening stereotypes. For example, comments like this were common: “I really liked and admired so-and-so and it was quite confronting to me to realize that I just *assumed* she’d share my perspective when we went into the dialogue. I didn’t realize I carried stereotypes about people “on the other side.” This will be much less common in communities where people fully understand that they can personally like and care about another person even though they have quite different views on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

### 3.6.2 How important is it for the participants to have substantially different perspectives?

This depends on their goals and interests. Some people will only want to participate in dialogue that includes people with a range of views. Others may be happy to explore the complexities of their own thinking with people who don't have radically different views, but who do have different experiences, concerns, and knowledge.

The endeavor of dialogue, as a search for mutual understanding, presumes some significant differences among participants. However, it is important not to underestimate how much learning and reflection can take place, even in groups that do not include wide variations in viewpoints. Groups that have greater diversity of perspective may spend more time in "dialogue." Groups with less diversity may move more readily toward deliberation or joint activities that involve learning or action. Both can be satisfying, depending on one's goals and preferences.

JDG has conducted dialogues that included people who described themselves as holding "opposite" perspectives, such as people who identify fully with the Israeli right wing and the settlement movement on the one hand and anti-Zionist anarchists on the other. It has also held dialogues with people whose perspectives are much closer to each other. Both types of dialogue have been useful in different ways.

*The endeavor of dialogue, as a search for mutual understanding, presumes some significant difference among participants.*

*However, it is important not to underestimate how much learning and reflection can take place, even in groups that do not include wide variations in viewpoints.*

If members of an ongoing group appear to have very few differences, we suggest that you consider the possibility that the group has not yet developed enough trust to reveal their differences. (See Section 6.3.1 for tips on raising concerns with the group about how things are going.) Another possibility is that the group is, consciously or not, choosing to emphasize similarities that might ground joint action; for example,

the group might want to transform itself into a committee that sponsors adult education programs at the synagogue that involve more dialogue and less debate. If you are uncertain about how to handle what seems like a lack of significant differences or a downplaying of differences, you will do the group a service by simply asking questions and encouraging clarity about purposes and hopes.

### 3.6.3 How important is an even or balanced distribution of perspectives?

A balanced distribution is ideal but not always attainable. Even if you have had a chance to talk to potential participants before the meeting, you will not be able to predict exactly how balanced the group will appear during the dialogue.

As a dialogue session unfolds, the participants will often challenge any assumptions you may have made about their ideas and feelings, and they may challenge their own assumptions about themselves. Dialogue encourages people to shed the labels that might have tempted you to think, for example, that a group would consist of three people who share one general perspective, three who share an opposite perspective, and two who are "in the middle." As people tell their stories and share their uncertainties as well as their certainties, dividing lines and categories become blurred. Participants come to see each other more as

individuals than as people on one “side” or the other.

We strongly recommend that you avoid convening a group that has one person whose views are very different from all the others. Such “isolates” are vulnerable to feeling alone and “ganged up on.” They often feel that they must single-handedly represent or defend their viewpoint or group rather than simply speak for themselves (even though they and all of the other participants have explicitly agreed to speak only for themselves). (See 6.3.6 for ideas about how to facilitate in this situation.)

### **3.6.4 Do all the participants have to be Jewish? When and how can we include non-Jews?**

Some people feel most comfortable discussing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in a group that includes only other Jews. Others may want to include non-Jews in their dialogue as well, for a variety of reasons.

As you consider how much, if at all, you should open a dialogue program to non-Jews, you should think carefully about the purpose of the dialogue: Who needs to be in the room in order for the participants to have the kind of conversation they’d like to have? Whose presence in the room would make it harder for them to have that kind of conversation? You should also consider how prepared you are to facilitate a dialogue that includes both Jews and non-Jews.

JDG has worked with some synagogues and other groups that have invited their members’ non-Jewish spouses and partners, or people who are considering conversion. In one case, the synagogue’s leaders felt very strongly that their members’ non-Jewish spouses and partners were full members of their community and should therefore be fully welcomed into the dialogue. In another, they welcomed a participant who was attending classes at the synagogue in preparation for converting to Judaism, and whom they considered an important part of the community.

Some groups have also invited non-Jews who are closely connected with their communities, or other people whose perspectives they particularly want to include.

In one interesting case, a synagogue staff-person mistakenly placed a newspaper ad for an event that was supposed to be open only to members. A non-Jewish person from another part of the city showed up for the first session, and the synagogue’s other participants decided on the spot to welcome her in. They felt glad that they had done so, and she continued to attend for nine more meetings.

### **3.6.5 What about inter-faith dialogues and other kinds of inter-group dialogue?**

While this guide is not designed specifically for inter-group dialogues, and they can present a number of challenges that we do not address here, many of the ideas in this guide will be useful in planning inter-group dialogue.

Members of the PCP staff have facilitated Arab-Jewish, Israeli-Palestinian, Muslim-Jewish, and various other inter-group dialogues over the years. They have produced a guide very similar to this one that is focused on one topic: *Fostering Dialogue Across Divides: A Nuts and Bolts Guide from the Public Conversations Project*.

JDG has led two programs that were set up explicitly as inter-group dialogues, bringing together roughly equal numbers of Jews and non-Jews. One brought together Jewish and non-Jewish students at a particular

college. The Jewish students who contacted them were especially interested in talking with non-Jewish anti-war activists with whom they had very tense relations. Although they felt that this kind of dialogue was outside their area of expertise, one of their Jewish facilitators and one of their non-Jewish facilitators partnered together to lead the session, and it turned out to be very useful.

When planning inter-group dialogues, it is important to involve an equal number of facilitators from each group, or else only facilitators who are not part of either group. Please contact PCP or JDG for more information about inter-group dialogue.

### **3.6.6 How old should the participants be?**

We have found that dialogue sessions are most appropriate for mature teens and adults. While some of the conversational formats described here can be useful for younger school-aged youth, the questions that are suggested probe for individuals' viewpoints about complicated matters and they ask participants to reflect upon and speak about the life experiences that have shaped those viewpoints. It is usually during the teen years that people develop their own views about religion, politics and history, shaped not only by the views of their parents, but also by discussions with a variety of relatives, teachers and peers, and by study and/or travel. A mature twelve-year-old might be ready to respond thoughtfully to the dialogue questions suggested in this guide while another youth at age fifteen may not be ready.

There can be many benefits to bringing together a mixed age group to talk about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. JDG has led sessions that included a mixture of teenagers, young adults, and older adults. People of different ages sometimes have very different experiences with Israel and very different experiences as Jews in the U.S. A diversity of ages can contribute to an interesting range of insights, ideas, and questions. Of course, participation should be voluntary at all ages. Parents should not pressure their kids to attend or to be in the same small group with them at a dialogue event.

## **3.7 Issuing Invitations and Connecting with Participants**

### **3.7.1 How should I invite people?**

Calling people by phone or talking with them in person gives you an opportunity to hear about their hopes and concerns and respond to their questions. Written invitations have the advantage of ensuring that all who are invited have been oriented in the same way. At PCP, we usually combine the two approaches. We often start with a written invitation, and then follow up with a phone call to those who have expressed interest. Sometimes we contact people first by phone, and then follow up with a written confirmation of the invitation.

*All participation  
should be informed  
and voluntary.*

■ Whatever methods you use, your goal should be to make sure that the participants accept the invitation only if they understand what it is they are being invited to (and what it is not), and accept the invitation freely, with no pressure. All participation should be informed and voluntary.

In some cases, the conveners or the planning committee take responsibility for much of the work of inviting people and finding out about their concerns; in some cases, the facilitators take on this



responsibility. The higher the stakes of the conversation, the more important it is that this work be done carefully. Conveners and facilitators have different strengths and it is important to draw on both and to invest sufficiently in clarifying purposes and preparing participants.

### **3.7.2 How important is it to require that the participants RSVP?**

There are several reasons to ask participants to RSVP. If they don't, you will be uncertain about how many people are coming and you won't know how many facilitators you will need. Even if only fifty percent of the people RSVP, you'll be better prepared than if you don't ask for RSVPs; then you won't know whether to expect ten or a hundred. In addition, consider asking for a phone number or e-mail address or for other information that will allow you to ensure a range or balance of perspectives—if you decide that this is important. If you aren't able to send a confirming e-mail to people who have said they will attend, you will be uncertain about how well informed they will be about the purpose of the dialogue, and what will be expected of them.

### **3.7.3 What should I include in a written invitation?**

In addition to the usual information about time, place, and RSVP information, we recommend that you include something about:

- the spirit and goal of the event (for example, to promote open speaking, careful listening, and greater understanding, rather than achieving agreement or resolution of differences)
- the guidelines and structure (for example, “Unlike many discussions, this one will be structured to promote careful listening and to discourage rebuttal and criticism.”)
- the number of sessions or the amount of time to which you ask participants to commit
- encouragement to decline the invitation if it does not appeal to them

You will find a sample invitation and flyer in Appendices G and H.

### **3.7.4 What purposes are served by pre-meeting conversations with the participants?**

Talking with participants in advance of the dialogue will allow you to:

- begin to get to know the participants and their hopes and concerns
- model the sort of respectful inquiry and curiosity that you hope to promote in the dialogue
- help the participants to prepare for the experience and “own” the decision to attend and contribute, by:
  - ensuring that they understand the purposes of the event and are prepared to work toward those purposes
  - ensuring that no one has pressured them to attend (see Section 3.7.10)
  - encouraging them to reflect on and commit to their constructive intentions (see Section 2.4)

- learn what you need to know about group composition. You can:
  - develop a sense of the participants' range of perspectives and determine if you need to recruit any additional participants in order to avoid having an "isolate." A convener who recruited a set of participants may have a less accurate sense of people's perspectives than she thinks.)
  - let participants know who else has agreed to attend and ask whether there is anything you should know about their relationships with each other. If you learn that one participant is another's spouse, mother-in-law, professor, or recent rival in a congregational policy debate, you can ask if the participant thinks that that relationship will interfere with her ability to participate in the way that she hopes to participate.

Specific ideas about questions to ask can be found in Section 2.4 and Appendix F.

### **3.7.5 How might the pre-meeting conversations influence what I do in the session?**

There are many possibilities. For example:

- At the beginning of the session, you will be able to greet the participants in a more personal way than if you had not talked with them in advance.
- In your opening comments, rather than simply reminding participants about the purpose that was stated in the invitation, you can offer a much richer sense of what you believe their shared purposes are for being together. You can use words and phrases that you heard from them in your pre-meeting conversations. In most cases, you can do this without attributing particular comments to particular individuals. If you see a need to attribute someone's word or phrase, check with that person first. After your opening comments, you can then you can check with the participants to make sure the statement of purpose that you've woven together adequately reflects their shared purpose.
- Talking with the participants in advance will help you to draft agreements that work well for the group. This will reduce the likelihood that you will have to spend a lot of time at the beginning of the session negotiating agreements, when participants will probably be eager to move on with the more substantive part of the dialogue. It will also demonstrate your commitment to respond to the participants' needs. When you talk with participants in advance of the dialogue, you can offer your ideas about agreements that are often helpful and ask how well they fit the group's hopes and concerns. Then you can use their responses to customize the agreements that you will propose during the meeting.
- Participants may tell you about hot button words or slogans that they hope not to hear during the dialogue. You can inquire what those words mean to them and thereby heighten your awareness of particular sensitivities. If those words come up in the dialogue, you can encourage people to describe what they mean by them, and to inquire about what those words mean to others.
- In many cases, the phone conversations will influence your crafting of opening questions. If you are designing a single-session dialogue, or the opening session of a series, however, we recommend that you seriously consider using questions like the ones presented in Sections 7.2 and 7.3. They have been widely tested by PCP and JDG and have proven effective for many kinds of participants.

### **3.7.6 When is it necessary to have pre-meeting conversations with the participants?**

If you plan to work with a community that has experienced harmful tensions and/or in which the stakes for this conversation are high, we recommend that you proceed only if you are able to talk with participants in advance. If the stakes are lower, you can offer a program with less advance discussion. In all cases, make sure to give participants a clear sense of what they are being invited to and encourage them to contact the conveners or facilitators with questions or concerns.

### **3.7.7 Can pre-meeting e-mails replace phone calls?**

Some but not all of the purposes served by phone calls can be served by e-mails instead. In e-mails you can introduce yourself and provide (or reiterate) information about the event and its purposes. Then you can ask the participants to respond to some of the questions you might have asked them in a phone call. You can ask them to preview the proposed agreements and ask for their suggestions. Not everyone will respond to e-mails, however, even with a follow-up request to respond.

If you communicate by e-mail, you won't be able to build relationships with the participants in as natural a way. You won't have the conversational cues of tone, pace, and style that help people to know each other. In addition, it will be harder for you to model inquiry. In a phone call, you can respond to participants' ideas and concerns immediately and ask them questions. If you are communicating only by e-mail, it is less likely that you will ask all of the questions that might occur to you to ask in a conversation.

### **3.7.8 Can I invite people to a dialogue through a public notice, an announcement at services, or a flyer?**

There are advantages to using a flyer or a public announcement as one component of an invitation strategy:

- You may be able to reach more people.
- By casting a wide net you can avoid guesswork about who might be interested—guesswork that may unwittingly reinforce unfounded ideas about who cares about the issues and has something valuable to say!

There are some disadvantages as well:

- You can have pre-meeting conversation only with those participants who RSVP. Even if you request RSVPs, some people will likely show up without replying, and therefore without preparation.
- You also will not be sure how many participants are coming, what the range or balance of perspectives will be, or how many facilitators you will need.

You can be most comfortable using a public advertisement if:

- the stakes are not especially high, either because the participants will be strangers to each other or the community is not experiencing significant tensions
- you are prepared in terms of space and facilitation staff to handle a large number of participants

A two-step strategy may be best in a particular community. For example, a synagogue or organization could publish a notice in their newsletter that:

- indicates that plans are being made to offer an opportunity for dialogue
- explains what is meant by “dialogue”
- conveys any pre-set parameters about when the dialogue might take place, how many meetings it would include, how many participants would be involved, and so on. For example: “The synagogue may decide to offer a community-wide opportunity for dialogue next spring. Right now, we want to identify a group of six to eight people with varied perspectives who would be willing to try out a four session series . . .”
- lists a contact person

Then, the contact person can help the facilitators or conveners put together a list of interested people who can be invited individually, in writing and through phone calls.

### **3.7.9 Suppose potential participants ask how this will differ from an ordinary conversation?**

Here are some talking points that might be useful.

#### **Atmosphere**

The atmosphere of this dialogue may feel somewhat familiar. It may remind them of some conversations that have happened spontaneously and informally—respectful conversations in which no one dominated, real questions were asked, time was shared, and mutual listening and learning took place.

#### **Communication Agreements**

Participants will be asked to make communication agreements that foster an exploratory, respectful, and compassionate spirit. For example, they will be asked to speak from the heart and listen with resilience—even when they don’t like what they hear. They will be asked to notice the assumptions they are making and then find a way to test them out by asking questions. They will be asked to refrain from attempts to persuade and refute and, instead, shift into exploring their curiosity about the other participants’ experiences and perspectives.

#### **Processes and Structures**

The processes and structures will be more formal than in ordinary good conversations. They may feel a bit unnatural—at least for a while. For example, during the early portion of the dialogue, people will be asked to respond to a couple of questions in a “go-round” with a time limit and no interrupting.

#### **Goals**

Often when people talk about a divisive issue, they hope to persuade each other or come to an agreement. In dialogue, people seek instead to gain understanding of views that are different from their own, to learn about the experiences, concerns, and deeply held values that shape those views, and to make themselves better understood. In many cases, participants also come away with a better understanding of themselves and the complexity of their own views.

Participants in dialogue often ask what they should do about their desire to convince other people of their point of view. If they feel the urge to argue and convince, despite their interest in dialogue, does that make them unsuited for the dialogue?

You can explain that it is natural to feel the impulse to persuade others when you are talking about something that you care deeply about. It is because people have such strong feelings and habits of arguing and persuading that structures and communication agreements are helpful in dialogue. The structures and agreements help people to resist the urge to persuade and to hold on to the spirit of dialogue. You can also let them know that dialogue and debate are two different kinds of communication, and that each of these modes encourages and discourages different ways of interacting. One isn't more valuable than the other, but it is important for people in dialogue to stay focused on what they came to do together and not to slip into debate.

### **3.7.10 What should I do if a potential participant is reluctant or does not seem genuinely interested?**

Potential participants may express reluctance to participate for any number of reasons. For example, they may want to put all of their energy into advocacy, or they may doubt that any structure could provide enough safety for them to discuss their beliefs.

In these cases, you should explain that your purpose in calling is to make sure they understand what you are offering and to answer any questions, but not to talk them into participating. Assure them that you will fully respect whatever decision they make. Explain that dialogue works best when the participants genuinely want to be there. It is very helpful when people are candid about their reluctance and when they know themselves well enough to state that it's not what they want to do at this point in time.

*Dialogue works best when the participants genuinely want to be there.*

If a potential participant indicates that someone has pressured him to attend, inquire about whether there was anything about his decision to give in to the arm-twisting that can be construed as genuine personal interest. If his response to that question is not reassuring, say that you do not want him to feel pushed, and that you will respect his decision not to participate if that is what feels right.

### **3.7.11 What if invitees say they want to come late or leave early?**

We strongly recommend requiring full attendance at the beginning of a single session and at the first meeting of a series. This is when the participants are introduced to one another and to the dialogue, and when they make communication agreements with each other. In subsequent sessions in a multi-session series, late arrivals are more tolerable, although they are still somewhat disruptive.

*We strongly recommend requiring full attendance at the beginning of a single session and at the first meeting of a series.*

Leaving early is much less problematic, but the group should know, at the start, that someone needs to leave early. See 6.5.3 for tips on facilitating in these circumstances.

### **3.7.12 What if people say they can't come to all of the sessions in a series?**

We recommend that you require attendance at the first session, as that session is crucial for getting oriented to the dialogue and beginning to foster trust and personal connection. Absences at other sessions are negotiable. The second session will probably be the next most important. The earlier in the series an absence occurs, the more important it will be to find a way to give the person who was absent a sense of what she missed. Ideas about how to do this can be found in Section 6.5.2.

If a participant says she will miss a particular session, make a note of it so that you can acknowledge the absence at the beginning of that session: "This is the date that Mary told us she had to be out of town for her son's graduation." That way, people won't wonder if Mary has mysteriously dropped out.



## 4. Preparing Your Plan

### Decisions about Design

This chapter begins with broadly applicable advice about creating a plan for a dialogue program. Next comes some specific guidance for designing one-session dialogues and programs for large groups. The final section offers ideas for designing a session that incorporates a video, a reading, a panel discussion, or another common stimulus.

Chapter 7 offers detailed sample formats that exemplify many of the practices described here. You may find it helpful to look ahead at them as you read this chapter.

### 4.1 Basic Elements of Design: Sequence, Questions, and Structures

#### 4.1.1 What is a typical sequence in a session?

##### Orientation to the Dialogue

- Welcome participants.
- Orient them to the spirit and purposes of dialogue. When possible, refer back what you have learned about the participants' hopes for the dialogue.
- Give an overview of the session and indicate the ending time.
- Propose communication agreements that support the participants' goals and ask them to accept or revise the proposed agreements.
- Introduce your role as facilitator and request that people let you know if they have concerns about how the process is going.
- Address logistical issues (e.g., bathrooms, cell phone etiquette, availability of pads and pens).

##### Participant Introductions

- Invite the participants to introduce themselves to each other in a manner that helps them to feel known in a way that they would like to be known.

##### Opening Questions

- Pose some opening questions or an opening exercise that invites people to speak personally and in a non-polemical way about what matters to them.
- Indicate the format (often a “go-round”) and the time limits for responses.

### Less Structured Conversation

- Invite participants into a less structured conversation that builds on responses to the opening questions.

### Closing

- Invite participants to discuss next steps (if relevant).
- Invite parting comments that call for reflection on the dialogue experience.
- Invite candid feedback for you as facilitator and, if relevant, for the planning team or convener.

### 4.1.2 How closely should I follow the formats you provide in Chapter 7?

We have found that some facilitators are most comfortable following step-by-step instructions to the letter, and reading scripted comments word for word. Others prefer to improvise much more, using their natural “voice” and drawing on their intuition. (See Appendix D for a metaphorical description of these stylistic differences, “A Tale of Two Grandmothers.”) Do whatever is most comfortable for you.

No matter how conservative or improvisational your personal style is, it will be up to you to

- Know enough about your group—their needs, their culture(s), and their specific circumstances—to make appropriate adjustments to the sample formats and language

*-and-*

- Know enough about yourself to anticipate what you will need in terms of plans, notes, “scripts” or visual cues in order to:
  - be attentive to the language you use, without allowing your use of a “script” to disconnect you from yourself or the participants
  - stay on track in relation to the purposes of each section and the overall timing
  - stay in role as facilitator
  - maintain clarity about each facilitator’s role in each segment (when you are working with a co-facilitator)

If you are new to facilitation, we recommend that you err on the side of using a script, with modifications that make the language seem more natural for you. Working from a personalized script will probably help you to speak more concisely and feel less nervous.

See Chapter 5 for more ideas about preparing yourself emotionally and practically to facilitate.

### 4.1.3 What’s a “go-round?”

A go-round is a highly structured way of speaking and listening. It begins when you pose a question and then ask the participants to pause and reflect on their response before anyone speaks. Then, going in turn around the circle, each participant has a chance to respond to the question or to pass. When a go-round has been completed, you should check back with those who passed to see if they would like to have a turn to speak before the group moves on to the next question.



You can also invite people to respond “popcorn” style, meaning that participants can speak as they are ready, in no particular order. Ask the participants to raise their hands when they are ready to speak, and call on them as you see them. The basic guidelines stay in place:

- One person speaks at a time.
- There is no interrupting.
- Participants observe the time limit suggested for their response.
- No one speaks for a second time until everyone has either spoken or chosen to pass.

After the go-rounds we often invite participants to ask each other questions that will help them more fully understand something they have heard. If this is your plan, let the participants know about this in advance so that they can make note of questions they would like to ask later. (See Section 4.1.14.)

#### **4.1.4 What are the advantages of using go-rounds?**

Go-rounds are especially helpful at the beginning of a dialogue because they:

- provide a tight framework with clear expectations, which reduces anxiety for most people
- clearly separate the act of speaking and the act of listening
- create a level playing field in which everyone has equal access to the “group ear.” This can be important in groups where the presence of one or two outspoken and/or expansive members usually results in some people speaking first or longer.

#### **4.1.5 How should I decide between using a go-round or “popcorn” format?**

We recommend that you use the go-round format in one-session dialogues and at the beginning of a multi-session dialogue because it avoids awkward moments in which people try to figure out who is going to speak next. In order to make sure that no one feels compelled to speak before he is ready, however, make sure to allow an adequately long pause after you read each question, and make sure that you welcome the participants to pass whenever they prefer to do so.

In a multi-session group, the participants may begin to feel after a number of meetings that the go-round structure is too formal and no longer necessary. Even in this case, you will want to ensure that in the opening segment of the dialogue—when the participants take turns responding to an opening question or two-everyone gets to speak before anyone makes a second comment.

The “popcorn” format, in which people volunteer to speak as they feel ready, has advantages in some situations. For example, if you ask a group to brainstorm about next steps or plans for future sessions, there is a good chance that some people will have ideas that about which they are very enthusiastic, while others will readily admit to feeling uninspired, and some may draw a blank. In such a case, you may want to start by hearing ideas from the people who feel most ready and enthusiastic. Hearing such ideas can serve as a catalyst for other participants’ thinking and participation. However, if a pattern becomes established in which one person tends to lead in discussions about the future, a go-round format, with plenty of pause time before anyone speaks, may help the quieter participants to contribute more fully.

#### 4.1.6 Should I concern myself with the exact seating arrangements?

If you know something about the participants' perspectives or pre-existing relationship before they arrive, you may want to put nametags on the chairs in a way that alternates or mixes up different perspectives.

*In general, the deeper the divisions and distrust, the greater the need to prevent situations that are likely to cause annoyance or anxiety.*

This avoids a situation in which all of the people with one general perspective have spoken before any of the people with a different perspective have spoken. It can be especially useful to do this in single-session dialogues and in the first sessions of a series.

In multi-session groups with participants who have come to know each other well, the order of speaking is less crucial, particularly if divisions don't run deep. In general, the deeper the divisions and distrust, the greater the need to prevent situations that are likely to cause annoyance or anxiety.

#### 4.1.7 Who should speak first in a go-round?

The first person to speak in a dialogue session or in a go-round often has a particularly strong influence on the group. He can model a way of speaking that is thoughtful, responsive to the question, and appropriate to the time allotted, or else respond in a way that is off topic or long-winded. We recommend that you make a thoughtful choice about whom you invite to speak first.

It is easiest to invite the person sitting to your left or right to start. If you have concerns about starting with one of those participants, you can simply ask someone else. We sometimes assign seats with speaking order in mind.

You can also invite a volunteer to start a go-round: "Is there anyone who'd like to start?" If the group is just beginning, however, we recommend that you select a person to start, even if your choice is somewhat random. Those who volunteer to start may be best prepared to speak in a responsive and focused way or they may be more reactive or impulsive in their responses than other participants. As you work with a group you will learn fairly quickly whether there are any participants who you'd rather not have as first speakers on a regular basis—not only because of their potential impact on the group but also because you believe that they will contribute more thoughtfully to the conversation if they've heard other responses before they speak. In many groups this is not an issue.

#### 4.1.8 Can I skip the pauses before the go-rounds?

Pauses can be very supportive of the goals of dialogue for many reasons:

- It is difficult for people to listen attentively to what others are saying if they have not had time to collect their own thoughts.
- Speakers who have the chance to collect their own thoughts before they hear others speak are more likely to make their own distinctive contribution.
- People are less likely to speak in reaction to what others have said.

- People are usually more able to be succinct, clear, and on task if they have had time to think.

A pause can even be helpful when you're asking people to introduce themselves. It will give them a moment to decide what they most want to say. If your intuition tells you to skip the pause, think again. If your intuition still tells you to skip the pause, go with your intuition.

#### **4.1.9 Can I invite people to ask questions of each other in between go-rounds, instead of waiting until all of the go-rounds have been completed?**

Yes, but at some risk, depending upon the group. The process of responding to a sequence of two or three well-crafted questions and listening carefully to others often leads people to become more open to and curious about the other participants. This extended process will prepare them to ask good questions of one another. The more divided the group, the more likely it is to benefit from a highly structured opening. The restraint of the structure has a paradoxically liberating effect, as it supports people in speaking, listening, and reflecting in new ways.

*The restraint of the structure has a paradoxically liberating effect, as it supports people in speaking, listening, and reflecting in new ways.*

#### **4.1.10 What are the earmarks of a constructive opening question?**

Constructive opening questions typically serve some or all of the following purposes:

- 1) They encourage reflection and freshness of perspective.
- 2) They avoid narrowing assumptions, "buzz words," stereotypes, unhelpful dichotomies, and jargon.
- 3) They encourage speaking about ways that life experiences have shaped the meanings that participants attach to particular events, symbols, visions, and so forth, and the political perspectives they have adopted.
- 4) They focus on the experiences and views of those in the room rather than on what others outside of the room think or do.
- 5) They serve as antidotes, even in a small way, to ways of speaking that characterize the "old" conversation. For example, the questions you ask can:
  - invite people to express both their convictions and their doubts and confusion, and talk both about what they know and what they'd like to learn
  - inquire about personal meanings rather than single definitions of terms
  - avoid eliciting pronouncements about blame and virtue

"Bivalent" questions are useful in some cases. These questions welcome each participant to speak about different aspects of particular issue, for example: "What makes you feel safe and what makes you feel unsafe as a Jew in today's world?" Bivalent questions can be helpful if the group is making decisions about future plans. For example, if a proposal has been made, you can ask, "What do you think might be the advantages or disadvantages of doing that?" A discussion that has effectively welcomed all viewpoints is likely to result in a decision to which the group is more fully committed.

#### 4.1.11 When I'm deciding what questions to pose, how important is the specific language, sequence, and timing?

Very important.

When in doubt about the specific wording, sequence or timing of your questions, remember the purposes that you'd like the questions to serve. Think carefully about the likely impacts, helpful or not, of the choices you make. For example, consider whether your choices will:

- foster reflection, careful listening, and mutual understanding
- invite expression not only of deep convictions but also areas of uncertainty
- give participants an opportunity to present themselves and hear others in ways that dispel stereotypes and engender genuine curiosity and empathic connection

#### Language

Shifts in language can make a big difference. Sometimes people report that they've followed our recommendations and things didn't go well. Then we learn that they made major changes to the questions, for example, changing "What's at the heart of the matter for you?" to "What's your bottom line concern?" The first question asks for a heartfelt central concern. The second uses language associated with a bargaining position.

*Make sure to word analytic questions in way that invites people to speak personally and to share the complexity of their thinking, rather than to simply assert their conclusions.*

Take special care with the wording of more analytical questions. Make sure to word analytic questions in way that invites people to speak personally and to share the complexity of their thinking, rather than to simply assert their conclusions.

Notice the difference between this single question:

*What drives this Israeli government?*

and a series of questions like:

*How do you understand the Israeli government's recent decision?*

*What assumptions are you making about the goals, fears and motivation of the government as a whole or groups within it?*

*What personal experiences or sources of learning do you think led you to make those assumptions?*

The single question invites participants to offer a straightforward assertion about the government as a whole. The series of questions asks participants about their views but it also asks them to reflect upon their assumptions, to make distinctions that counter simple generalizations, and finally, to consider the influences in their life that may have shaped those assumptions.

Consider asking people to put themselves in the shoes of those whom they might readily criticize or blame. For example, "If you were the Prime Minister, what pressures—internal or external—might pull you in different directions? How do you think you'd handle those pressures? What would you be inclined to do? What do you think would make that approach promising or risky? Do you have ideas about how you'd maximize chances of success and minimize risks?"

**Sequence**

Sequence is also very important. Within a session each question lays a foundation for the next. Consider the three questions in the format in Section 7.2. The first invites people to introduce their general perspectives in a way that grounds their perspectives in their life experience. The second gives them an opportunity to say what deeply matters to them. Having said something about who they are and what they most care about, they are then likely to be open to answering the third question, which invites them to share some of their uncertainties or value conflicts. Reversing the order of the questions would elicit very different responses!

**Timing**

Questions that encourage people to come to know each other as complex individuals are powerful antidotes to the “old” conversation. Hearing other people’s stories opens participants to curiosity, connection and understanding; it also strongly discourages rebuttal and criticism. Questions that invite personal stories are usually excellent choices for the early part of a group’s dialogue experience. We recommend beginning with these questions in single-session dialogues, especially in a very divided community.

Ongoing groups often want to move into a discussion that focuses more directly on history or current events. Questions that invite people to analyze history and events can be useful in a group that has already built personal relationships of respect and trust. They also can be useful catalysts for groups and individuals to identify particular areas of confusion or uncertainty or gaps in their understanding.

■ *Hearing other people’s stories opens participants to curiosity, connection, and understanding. It also strongly discourages rebuttal and criticism.*

It’s hard to predict how long a particular group will need to take to build caring relationships, curiosity, and habits of thoughtful speaking and resilient listening before they address questions that are farther from their own experiences. In multi-session groups, the group’s readiness to handle more analytic questions in a dialogic spirit will vary greatly. (See Section 4.3 for guidance on designing for multi-session groups.)

#### **4.1.12 What are the advantages and disadvantages of posing short and simple questions versus questions with multiple parts?**

When short and simple questions do the “work” that you want them to do, they are preferable. For example, the second question in Section 7.1, “What is at the heart of the matter for you?” works very well in almost every situation. Some facilitators might choose to ask it in a way that links it to what people have already said in their responses to the first question, for example, “As you think about the general perspectives you hold, what is at the heart of the matter for you?”

On the other hand more complex questions and sets of questions can be useful in some cases. Look again at the set of questions detailed in Section 4.1.11:

*How do you understand the Israeli government’s recent decision?*

*What assumptions are you making about the goals, fears and motivation of the government as a whole or groups within it?*

*What personal experiences or sources of learning do you think led you to make those assumptions?*

*Questions that ask for hopes and concerns, advantages and disadvantages, certainties and uncertainties often bring out complexities within people's views and counteract stereotypes.*

A set of questions like this asks people first about their ideas, then the assumptions that lead them to those ideas, and it helps them to reflect more deeply on their assumptions. It also counteracts the tendency to make broad generalizations and pronouncements.

Bivalent questions, in particular, can encourage people to pay attention to two sides of a dilemma. Questions that ask for hopes and concerns, advantages and disadvantages, certainties, and uncertainties often dispel stereotypes as they bring out complexities within people's views. For this reason, asking the two parts together is often preferred.

However, if longer, multi-faceted questions are to serve their purpose, we recommend that you:

- present the questions in writing as well as verbally
- allow a lengthy pause after you read the questions
- encourage people to jot down their thoughts
- allow adequate time for responses
- remind participants before the go-round about the two parts (for example, "Please address both parts of the question during your time, unless you are choosing to pass on addressing one or the other.")
- check in with participants if one part of the question is being neglected: "Did you want to address the other part? If not, that's OK."

When two questions are closely related, it makes sense to ask them together. Participants are likely to touch on the second while answering the first in any case. (For example, "What does 'x' mean to you? Are there experiences or influences in your life that you think have led you to understand the word in that way and that you'd be willing to talk about?")

Multiple questions that are less related are best posed in separate go-rounds. Sometimes it doesn't matter much which decision you make, and shortness of time might be the factor that leads you to combine two questions into one go-round.

#### **4.1.13 Can I propose different communication agreements or let the group make up their own?**

We strongly advise against asking the group to develop their agreements from scratch because:

- It is likely to take a lot of time, leading many participants to feel impatient or annoyed with the facilitators, the other participants, or both.
- People who are eager to discuss the topic sometimes confuse communication agreements with substantive agreements. For example, a participant may propose an agreement about which ideas are acceptable to discuss during the dialogue and which are off limits. This can quickly lead into a substantive discussion about the issues before the "container" for dialogue has been established.
- The agreements not only serve the group, they help you in serving the group. If you want legitimacy

in making the interventions that you feel you'll need to be able to make—for instance, asking people not to interrupt or insult each other—you will want to have such agreements in place.

The more likely the group is to experience conflict or impatience, the less likely they will be to have a satisfactory experience creating their own agreements from scratch.

Of course, the proposed agreements should be clearly presented as *proposals* open to modification by the group.

Sometimes participants suggest modifications at the outset. Some groups might want to use some conventions they've found helpful in other settings. For example, Dr. Saundra Sterling Epstein, a high school teacher and Jewish Dialogue Group (JDG) colleague, has found it helpful to have her students use hand signals during their conversations. One hand signal, for example, indicates: "I have a brief question of clarification about something that was just said." Another means: "I have something that I'd like to say on another issue or topic."

Sometimes an ongoing group will adopt new procedures or agreements as they go along. If participants raise a concern during a follow-up call or in their written feedback, consider whether there are ways to address it by suggesting a change in the agreements. Alternatively, the concern might also indicate a need to remind participants about a particular agreement.

For more guidance about agreements, see Sections 2.6.1.

■ *The more likely the group is to experience conflict or impatience, the less likely they will be to have a satisfactory experience creating their own agreements from scratch.*

#### **4.1.14 How should I handle the transition from the go-round structure to less structured conversation?**

This will depend on your intuition about the continued need for structure. One way to keep your options is to use if you have a handout listing the Public Conversations Project's (PCP) "Four Pathways to Connected Conversation." (You will find a handout in Appendix K.) With this resource as a guide, you can use your judgment as to whether it would be best to ask people to start with only the first pathway listed: asking each other questions. This is a good option if you want to encourage people to focus on their interest in each other's views. The three other options also promote an organic and connected conversation, but are best offered after you are reasonably confident that the participants have entered into the spirit of dialogue and will not be very tempted to slip into debate. In some groups, you can offer all four options at the beginning, but even then you can suggest that people start with their questions. The four pathways are:

- **Ask a question**  
Is there something someone said that you'd like to understand better? If you ask a question, be sure it reflects genuine curiosity and is not a challenge in disguise
- **Note a point of learning**  
Have you heard something that stirred fresh thoughts or feelings?
- **Pick up and weave a thread**  
Has an interesting theme or idea emerged that you'd like to add to?

- **Clarify differences**

Have you heard something you disagreed with? If so, first check to see if you understood it correctly. Then say what was unsettling to you about what you heard and why.

We recommend that you let participants know, before the go-rounds, that you will be giving them an opportunity later to ask each other questions. This will encourage participants to develop their curiosity and interest in the others, and to avoid formulating judgments or rebuttals as they listen. Another approach is to request that every participant write down at least one or two questions to ask of other participants—questions that will help them better understand the views of another participant.

Whichever approach you take, be sure to give them time to think about and jot down their questions. At the beginning of the “connected conversation” segment, remind them about the kind of question you are inviting, and then give them a chance to think. Depending on how much you want to emphasize question-asking, you can also give them time to formulate questions after each go-round. You can even pause to allow participants to jot down questions after each person has spoken, as in the exercise in Section 7.4.

#### **4.1.15 How should I introduce myself at the beginning of the dialogue?**

When you welcome the participants to the dialogue, or during an introductory go-round, you may wish to say a sentence or two about yourself. If you do, keep your role and purposes in mind. For example:

- Be careful not to say anything that even indirectly reveals your own perspective on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict or any related issues!
- Be brief. Time is frequently an issue, especially in single-session groups, and you will have no choice but to take a fair amount of time for your opening remarks. For these reasons, think twice about saying more than a sentence about yourself. If you have greeted each participant upon arrival, you will have already achieved some personal connection; if you have had pre-meeting conversations, you may be the most connected person in the group.
- Don't feel you need to present yourself as an expert. JDG facilitators usually introduce themselves as volunteers who have prepared themselves carefully but who do not have professional training as facilitators. If you let the participants know that you are a volunteer, and that you are new at this, the overwhelming majority will appreciate your effort and humility.
- Within the bounds of your role, feel free to present yourself as a human being! At the beginning of the first session of a series, for example, if you have asked participants to introduce themselves by speaking about a passion or pre-occupation unrelated to the issue, you can make a brief comment as well, “I am passionately excited about the birth of my first grandchild who I will visit for the first time next week.” Similarly, you can speak briefly during the “check-in” in a multi-session group (see Section 4.3.4). You may be the one who needs to say something, for example, “I had a root canal today so if I seem a little less energetic than usual, it's because I'm still recovering.” Hopefully, your check-in will usually be something simple like: “I'm fine, and I'm happy to see you all again.”



#### 4.1.16 What kind of language and tone should I use when I'm facilitating?

Speak in a warm, respectful way, using plain language. Avoid using jargon or any other language that the participants might find confusing or off-putting. Present yourself as a “regular” human being who is playing a particular role—not as an authority who is superior. Also, bring positive energy but don't act like a cheerleader for dialogue, and don't make yourself the center of attention. If the participants leave the dialogue feeling good about what they've accomplished with each other, and only secondarily appreciating that you played a helpful role, you've probably done a very good job.

*Avoid using jargon or any other language that the participants might find confusing or off-putting.*

While conversations about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict are generally very serious, and they often bring up sadness, anger, or fear, there may be times when lightness and humor are perfectly appropriate, even helpful. A bit of gentle humor can help to ease tension and connect participants with one another. If you tend to use humor in your everyday life, don't feel you need to eliminate that from your style. Be yourself, but make sure your humor is not at the participants' expense.

In their opening comments, JDG facilitators sometimes include a line that describes the need for a dialogue in a natural, informal way, for example, “We want to help people to talk across political differences about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict without driving each other crazy.” Similarly, when introducing the agreements or the connected conversation, they might say something like: “If you ask a question of another participant, make sure it's a real question, based on real curiosity about their ideas, feelings, and experiences, and not a disguised challenge. I know that sometimes when I'm arguing with someone, I'll ask them a question that's not a real question, but just a way to get back at them, to show them they're wrong, or to trap them into saying something. Lots of people do this when they argue. So, don't do that. It can be good to stop and think before you ask a question: ‘Do I already know the answer to this?’ If so, it's probably not a good question for the dialogue.” Reversing roles by explaining how you, the facilitator, might be likely to act if you were in the position of the participants will help the participants to see their experience as normal, and this will also help to set them at ease.

#### 4.1.17 What information should I include in the agenda that I give to the participants, and what should I write up for myself to use?

Give them whatever will help them stay focused and oriented, and create for yourself whatever will help you stay oriented and focused. This usually requires creating both a participant agenda (a sample appears in Appendix C) and a more detailed plan for yourself and the other facilitators, like the plans offered in Chapter 7.

The participants' agenda should provide a basic outline of the session. In some cases, you may include the go-round questions that you plan to pose. If you want to have the flexibility to change the questions during the session, you may want to omit the questions from the agenda. The agenda does not need to list how long each segment of the dialogue will take, and printing the exact times could be a distraction if the session gets off schedule. You may want to print the agreements and the suggestions for the connected conversation on the back of the agenda.

The plan that you and other facilitators will use should include all this information, as well as detailed scripts or notes for each time you will make prepared comments. It should also indicate times so you can easily track how well you're doing in staying on schedule.

## 4.2 Designing a Single-Session Dialogue

### 4.2.1 What are the special challenges of single-session design?

It can be challenging to design a single dialogue session that meets participants' expectations for substantive exchange, especially if you have only one evening. Of course, weekend events are a possibility, as are more extended times on weekdays that include a dinner. (See Section 3.4.3.)

If you are working with a time frame of two or two-and-a-half hours, we recommend that you:

- **communicate reasonable expectations to participants**

For example, "In this single dialogue, you will not have time to discuss all aspects of the conflict that are important to you, or all of your thoughts and feelings. We do hope, however, that in this time together you can begin to talk about what the conflict means to you, and what you're struggling with. If you'd like to have a more extended dialogue, we can talk at the end about ways to make that happen."

- **guard against wishful thinking about how much can be packed into one session**

The sample formats in Chapter 7 give estimated times that assume a group of six participants. If you have more participants, you will have to reduce the number of go-rounds, reduce the time allotted to each speaker (although there is little room for reduction here), or limit the less structured time to only a couple of participant-initiated questions and answers.

- **don't hurry the opening segment during which people make agreements, introduce themselves, and speak about their personal experiences**

A conversation that starts in the "old way," with statements of position, will very likely continue to be "old." At the beginning of the dialogue, it is critical for participants to have a chance to speak personally and to get to know each other as people.

- **don't drop the closing segment of the dialogue**

Parting words gives people a chance to articulate a fresh question, even if there's not time to pursue it; correct a possible misperception of something they said; raise a concern while there is still a little time to address it; and express appreciation for other participants' contributions to the dialogue. A good closing question often brings out the lessons that people have learned about what it takes to have a "new" conversation about these issues. The closing reflections also provide a chance for people to share their hopes for future conversations.

- **offer the participants an opportunity to register interest in more extended dialogue or other next steps**

This can be as simple as including a question about next steps on the feedback form. For example, the form could ask: "Would you be interested in participating in a more extended dialogue, such as a four-session series? If so, what would make it most satisfying for you? Are there particular questions or issues you'd like to discuss? Any thoughts about format or who you would most like to talk with?"

Don't promise more than you can deliver. If you are not in a position to make a next step happen, be clear

about what you can do. If nothing else, you can pass on requests to a convener or community leader who might be able to make something happen. You can also make connections among the people who expressed interest and invite them to contact you if they want help in finding a facilitator. Be sure to share participants' contact information only with their permission.

#### **4.2.2 What should be different about my design if I'm offering a "public" dialogue session?**

If you are working with a less prepared group, you will have to say more at the outset about what the dialogue is and what it isn't. You will also have to be prepared for a large group. (See Section 4.4).

#### **4.2.3 What if I am asked to offer an abbreviated dialogue experience in only an hour?**

We recommend that you do not try to squeeze the formats we present in Chapter 7 into only one hour. In many settings, however, you can give people a taste of the experience of dialogue in a format like this:

##### **Opening** (5-10 minutes)

Make a brief presentation about what dialogue is and isn't, and preview what you're offering to the group. Explain that in such a short time, they will just have a brief experience of speaking and listening, and they won't have time for the less structured aspects of a typical dialogue.

##### **Agreements** (3-5 minutes)

Ask the group to make some agreements (see Section 2.2.1), including the agreement to honor any confidentiality requests that are made. Emphasize that participation is voluntary and anyone who wishes to pass on the entire exercise may do so.

##### **Speaking and Listening in Pairs** (30 minutes)

Ask people to pair up with another individual, preferably someone they don't know well. Lead the pairs through a highly structured series of speaking and listening, using questions like those suggested in the formats in Sections 7.2 and 7.3. The partners will take turns speaking and listening. Ask them to first think quietly about the questions for a minute or two—you will let them know when to begin talking. If you give the pairs six minutes per question (three minutes each) remind them to switch after three minutes have passed. Instruct the listeners to simply listen fully, and to notice when they are curious to learn more about the others' perspective and their experiences. While the other is speaking, they are not to interrupt. Let them know that they'll have time at the end to ask each other questions—not rhetorical questions or challenges—but questions that represent their genuine curiosity.<sup>4</sup> After you've guided them through the speaking and listening phase, remind them to ask questions that will help them to better understand, not questions that challenge or rebut or have embedded advice.

<sup>4</sup> This is a fairly simple approach to instructions for listening and question asking. PCP has developed more elaborate exercises for speaking, listening, and question asking. One of PCP's trainings is devoted solely to the art of question asking. It is entitled "Inquiry as Intervention: Crafting Questions with Purpose and Impact."

**Transition to Full Group (5 minutes)**

Ask the pairs to wrap up their conversations and check with each other to see if they want to make confidentiality requests. Then let them know that in five minutes, they will be re-convening as a full group and individuals will have an opportunity to say something about their experience of speaking to the questions—knowing they wouldn't be interrupted—and listening, knowing they would not be asked to agree or disagree but only to access their curiosity and learn more about the other person's perspectives and experiences.

**Full Group Sharing (10 minutes)**

Invite people to speak, as they are ready. Remind them that you are asking about their experiences, not about the specific content of what they or their partner said.

**Closing (2-5 minutes)**

Let people know how they can give you feedback, and if there is a way that they can let you or someone else know if they would be interested in a fuller dialogue experience. (See Appendix E for feedback forms.)

A sample agenda for a session like this appears as Appendix L.

#### **4.2.4 Can I split up a dialogue session into two one-hour components?**

This is not an ideal arrangement, but it can work if the stakes for the conversation are not high.

JDG has occasionally led one-time dialogue sessions as workshops at conferences, and split them up into two sections in order to fit them into the schedule. At one conference, for example, they were offered one hour on Tuesday afternoon and one hour on Wednesday. They asked people to commit to attending both parts, and split the agenda in half.

A good way to split up the dialogue is to conduct the first two go-rounds followed by an abbreviated connected conversation on the first day, and then pick up with the third go-round and a longer connected conversation on the second day.

#### **4.2.5 What if the circumstances warrant moving slowly or if it is unclear whether a particular synagogue or organization feels ready for dialogue?**

You can offer to facilitate a preliminary session in which they can explore whether or not they would like to plan a full dialogue program. In this session, you can pose questions that are similar to those you might ask individuals in pre-meeting calls about the hopes and concerns they have about discussing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in their community. A session of this kind will give them the experience of a dialogue format, and it will allow them to develop a collective understanding of what they might gain and what they would want to avoid in a dialogue program. If they decide to move forward, this session will also bring out ideas about what they can do to plan a promising dialogue. You can find sample questions for a preliminary dialogue of this kind in Section 7.5, question set #35.

## 4.3 Designing a Multi-Session Series

### 4.3.1 Should I plan beyond the first meeting?

If you have pre-meeting contact with participants, you are likely to develop ideas for subsequent sessions, but we recommend that you do not get attached to those ideas or make promises to any participants about what the group will do beyond the first session. Let participants know that you are committed to creating each session plan in a manner that is responsive to their emerging interests. If asked about the range of possibilities, you can offer some examples, using Section 7.5 as a source of ideas.

*Let participants know that you are committed to creating each session plan in a manner that is responsive to their emerging interests.*

Of course you can offer a set curriculum, and it might work very well, particularly if you are transparent about it so participants can make an informed decision about participating. In one way or another, you want to be sure that what you are offering is in alignment with participants' wishes.

In this guide, we do not offer ideas for set curricula because our multi-session work has been characterized by a responsive approach to design and no two multi-session groups on the same topic have had the same needs and interests. We would be glad to share stories about how some of our multi-session programs have unfolded.

### 4.3.2 How should the opening session differ from a single-session dialogue?

In Section 7.2 we offer a sample format for the opening session in a series. As you prepare your plan, consider these recommendations:

- *When welcoming people to the first meeting of a series, remind participants that the program they have been invited to is a series.*

Reiterate that you hope they will commit to attend all the meetings, barring unforeseen circumstances. However, be sure to add that if anyone finds that the group is unsatisfying, they are free to discontinue. Let them know that if they decide to drop out, you hope they will give you feedback about their experience; when a group member drops out without explanation, the other participants might wonder whether it was because of something they said or did. Review the schedule, and make sure the participants know how to reach you if scheduling problems arise.

- *Offer a fuller description of the purpose of the dialogue.*

If you have had pre-meeting conversations with participants explain that your conversations have given you a greater understanding of what they hope will happen and what they want to avoid. Share some highlights of what you have learned using the participants' own language, but without attributing any particular statement to any specific person. Then check with the group to confirm that this more elaborate sense of purpose adequately represents what they all hope for. If you have not been able to learn much about the participants' specific hopes for the dialogue, you can simply remind them of the purpose statement that was in the invitation. In this case, we recommend that you include a question about hopes in the introductory go-round.

- *Consider spending a little more time going over the agreements, emphasizing that they can be revised as needed.*

Include the agreement about the use of e-mail (see Appendix J-2).

- *Take advantage of the fact that there will be future meetings, and allow as much time as seems appropriate for people to get to know each other.*

The format we suggest in Section 7.2 gives you options about how much to cover in the first session.

- *Leave time during the closing for the participants to share questions or issues they'd like to explore in the next session or at some point in the series.*

### **4.3.3 How should I structure a subsequent session?**

Section 7.3 offers a generic and very adaptable structure for subsequent sessions. It includes:

- welcoming remarks and a time for participants to “check-in”
- In introduction to the plan for the session that links it to the interests that participants expressed at the last meeting or in phone calls between the meetings. For example, you might say something like: “Based on what we heard from you last time about x and y interests, we thought it might be useful to address these questions tonight . . . . Did we hear you right? Does this plan make sense?”
- time for (1) one or more opening questions posed by the facilitator; (2) opening questions preceded by or associated with a common stimulus; or (3) an exercise like the stereotyping exercise (See Section 7.5). The common stimulus might be something that all the participants have done ahead of time—reading a chapter of a book or attending a panel discussion, for example. It can also be something that is done together, such as watching a video or sharing a set of readings from the Torah or Talmud. (See Section 4.5 for guidance on using a common stimulus and Section 7.5 for sample questions.)
- time for less structured “connected” conversation, often beginning with an invitation for participants to ask questions of each other
- a closing segment in which participants are asked how this session worked for them and what questions and issues they would like to explore with each other in subsequent sessions

### **4.3.4 Why use time in subsequent sessions for a “check-in”?**

The check-in has many purposes:

- to help people settle in to being part of the group again
- to help people acknowledge and then set aside any pre-occupations that they entered with, or to be understood for anything that might impact how they will participate (e.g., I'm not feeling well; I just raced in from the airport.)
- to help people build their personal relationships as they share the major happenings in their lives (e.g., a worrisome diagnosis in the family, a new job, the birth of a grandchild).

People with different personalities will use this opportunity very differently. Some are happy to just say, “I’m here and ready.” Others will value the more extensive personal contact. Some might need to be reined in from going on and on about their lives.

Check-ins are an especially good idea when talking about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict because recent news may have been very upsetting, making it important for people to be able to acknowledge what has happened and share their feelings. This might make it easier for them to focus on the more specific topic for the evening. While it may be appropriate at times to set aside a whole agenda to address very strong emotions associated with current events, dialogue groups should be wary of setting too low a threshold for putting aside their agenda, at the risk of losing their sense of purpose.

#### **4.3.5 How can I design subsequent sessions in a manner that is responsive to participants emerging needs and interests?**

It is impossible to predict what will interest a group over time, so custom design is usually required. By the third session, one group might want to delve into personal issues related to vulnerability and security, while another group might want to examine different understandings of a particular time in history, while yet another might want to discuss a video or a panel discussion that they all attended at the synagogue last month.

At PCP we call the practice of ongoing customization “emergent design.” In multi-session dialogue programs, we always design emergently. Even within one session we sometimes revise our design mid-course in order to respond to participant needs and interests.

In order to design emergently, you need to listen carefully to the group so that you know where participants want to go, then create a pathway that will take them to that place and help them to stay connected, curious, and open-hearted as they go there. Carefully crafted questions, asked in a well-maintained “container” for dialogue, provide those pathways.

*In order to design emergently, you need to listen carefully to the group so that you know where participants want to go, and then create a pathway to that place that helps them stay connected, curious, and open-hearted as they go there.*

#### **4.3.6 How can I involve participants in emergent design?**

There are many ways to learn about participants’ emerging interests and to engage them in collaborative planning for the next session. The simplest way is to ask them at the end of each session about their ideas for the next session. You can facilitate an informal discussion about this or you can gather ideas in a more structured way. For example, you can pass out 3x5 cards and ask people to write down one or more questions they’d like to ask others or have asked of them. Alternatively, you can ask them to simply write down topics they’d like to explore. Of course, people can pass if they don’t have any ideas.

If you have asked participants at the end of a meeting what they would like to do next and you are still uncertain, you can have phone calls with them between meetings. Phone calls are especially recommended after any meeting that has left you concerned or uncertain about how things are going for

participants and what they might need or want from you. If participants indicate that they are experiencing a problem, ask if they have any ideas about what might help. For example, you could ask if they would prefer more or less structure, a slower or faster pace in terms of getting to the “hottest” topics, changes or additions to the communication agreements, or more or less intervention on your part.

If you plan to elicit feedback through phone calls between meetings, make your best effort to talk with all participants, not just a subset. If you have a particular question or concern related to one person, for example, if someone made a suggestion in the last session, and you realize now that you need clarification, it is appropriate to call only that one person.

*Remember that your job is to help the participants have the conversations they want to have, in the spirit that they agreed to maintain. If that means spending some time at the beginning of a meeting fine-tuning a plan, it shouldn't be a problem.*

If you are unsure which topics are of most interest and you don't want to make phone calls, you can go into the next meeting with two or three ideas, ask if the participants have additional ideas, then let them choose. If two of the choices you offer are equally attractive, start with one and reserve the other for the next meeting (assuming participants maintain their interest in that topic.) Remember that your job is to help the participants have the conversations they want to have, in the spirit that they agreed to maintain. If that means spending some time at the beginning of a meeting fine-tuning a plan, it shouldn't be a problem.

#### **4.3.7 Where should I start in creating a custom design?**

After you have learned about participants' needs and interests, you will need to decide how to structure the next session and you will need to frame one or more opening questions.

For guidance in creating opening questions and exercises, start by looking at Section 7.5, which offers a large menu of sample question sets developed by PCP and JDG. Some of these questions have been used extensively, and some are simply ideas that haven't been field-tested. They are offered as examples of the types of questions that might prove useful depending on the needs and interest of a particular group. The exercise on stereotyping (Section 7.4) has been used extensively in many dialogues on many topics and is often appropriate for a second session.

#### **4.3.8 What if my group's interests are not addressed in the suggested question sets?**

In that case, you can begin with a go-round asking participants to say something about their perspective on an issue that interests them and something about how their perspective has been shaped through their experiences, or what meanings or values they attach to the issue.

If crafting a question involves naming a controversial issue, be sure to choose your words carefully. Avoid polarizing dichotomies that mirror the polemical discourse, and when specific terms are associated with different views, use multiple terms that you've heard the participants use, such as “security fence,” “wall” or “barrier.” The pull of the “old” divisive conversation is especially strong when the topics are framed in a manner similar to the topics addressed in the polarized public discourse. New conversations are invited



when fresh questions are asked—questions that encourage reflection, not well-rehearsed positions. (See Section 4.1.10.)

If you want to devote a whole session to a term that people use differently—a “buzz word”—you can use a question about that term as a springboard into dialogue. For example, participants can be asked what they mean when they use that term, and what images, memories, dreams, or fears they attach to that term. (See Section 7.5, question 29.)

After the go-rounds you can invite participants to ask questions of each other and move into “connected conversation.” As discussed in Section 4.1.14, we recommend that you let participants know at the outset that they will have an opportunity to ask each other questions after the go-round.

*If crafting a question involves naming a controversial issue, be sure to choose your words carefully. Avoid polarizing dichotomies that mirror the polemical discourse, and when specific terms are associated with different views, use multiple terms that you’ve heard the participants use.*

#### **4.3.9 How can I craft questions that are appropriate to the level of trust and connection in the group?**

The group will need a foundation of personal trust and connection in order to maintain the spirit of dialogue through discussions of especially hot issues. If you are uncertain about whether this foundation has been established, it is important to move slowly into the hottest topics. Specifically, we recommend that you:

- choose questions that elicit more personal reflection and story-telling and less analytic discussion
- emphasize listening and encourage participants to ask questions of each other. Structured times for speaking, listening, and asking thoughtful questions are especially important when maintaining the spirit of dialogue is most crucial
- be extremely careful to avoid using language or a common stimulus (for example, a video or reading) that exemplifies the sort of polemics you hope the participants will leave behind

#### **4.3.10 How should I design the last session of a series?**

As the dialogue series nears its conclusion, try to gauge participants’ level of interest in continuing. If you sense that there is significant interest in continuing, during the next-to-last session tell the participants that you’d like call them before the next meeting to talk about how things have been going and ask if they are considering the possibility of continuing. Explain that they won’t have to decide during the phone call, but it will help you to plan the next session if you know whether they are likely to want to wrap up the series or plan for the future. Discussing this by phone ahead of time will help participants begin thinking through their decision. It will also give you a chance to talk with them one-on-one about their experience in the group and, if relevant, their hopes or concerns about future dialogues.

If the group wants to continue, use the “last session” to reflect on what the experience has been like so far, and what participants hope to carry forward or change as they go forward. The same principles apply to renewing the commitment as apply to making the initial commitment: Foster clarity about purposes, roles, and any other hopes or expectations. For instance, the participants should discuss what they are committing to—an open-ended series or another set of five monthly meetings.

If the session will be the last, or is likely to be the last:

- *Plan for a substantive exchange that you think can be brought to closure in a relatively short time.*

This is not the time to open a new, highly charged topic! Save the entire second half of the session for either addressing the question about the future (if relevant) or simply closing with reflections on the process and other parting words. For example, you can ask participants if they are carrying a memorable moment or fresh question with them or what they most appreciated about what they and others did to contribute to the spirit and value of the experience.

- *At the end of the substantive portion of the dialogue, and before the final “parting words,” check with the group about confidentiality, if the group has made a confidentiality agreement.*

If participants want to share insights or ideas from the dialogue with people outside the group, you should make sure that everyone understands what is and isn’t “fair game.” The group can either continue with the rules about confidentiality that it originally agreed to or renegotiate them. The group should not loosen its confidentiality agreement unless everyone is comfortable with the change. It should always accommodate the person who desires the most protection.

- *If the group represents a subgroup within a larger community, include a closing question about what—if anything—they would like others in the community to know about their dialogue experience.*

In one series facilitated by JDG, participants decided to write about their experience in an article in the synagogue newsletter. The article included ideas about how the community could be more welcoming of a variety of views.

- *If an action plan of any sort emerges, make sure that the interest and motivation is coming from the participants, not from you.*

If only a subset of the participants is interested in a particular plan, make sure there is no misunderstanding about how it will be carried out (that is, by individuals rather than under the banner of the dialogue group).

- *Consider asking participants what they will hold onto from the dialogue.*

If participants have experienced the group as a welcomed safe haven in an otherwise polarized shared community, consider asking them if they intend to hold onto anything in the spirit of the dialogue when they are no longer meeting, if they anticipate any challenges doing so, and, if so, how they might meet those challenges individually or through mutual support.

- *Consider whether there is a culturally appropriate way to mark the closing of the dialogue.*

When JDG closes a series in a synagogue, they often invite the participants to sing a song—any song that they think would help them to close the dialogue. There is a usually a moment of chaos, and humor, while the participants brainstorm what to sing; nonetheless, singing provides a good ending. The participants also often share some special food, even if it is something simple like cookies or cake.

### 4.3.11 What if some participants want to continue and some don't?

Close the current group, say goodbye to the departing members, then make a plan to talk individually or as a group with the remaining members about their wishes for the future. One decision they will need to make is whether to continue as a smaller group or recruit new members.

## 4.4 Designing for Large Groups

### 4.4.1 How should I structure a dialogue with a large group?

You can welcome and orient participants in the full group, then divide them into small groups, each with a facilitator, for the “body” of the dialogue (about forty-five to sixty minutes). (See Section 3.6.1 on group size.) Then you can re-convene the full group for some parting words. The facilitator of the full group will need to decide how much of the opening material (opening comments, proposed agreements, etc.) to cover in the full group and how much to leave for the small group facilitators to cover.

When the large group reconvenes at the end, it is helpful to invite brief comments from participants. If you do this, however, we recommend that you be clear about the need to be brief. For example, you can say, “We’d like to take about ten minutes to hear some brief comments from people about their experience of the dialogue—what it was like to have this kind of conversation or what questions or ideas or commitments you are taking with you. We hope to hear from several people so please limit yourselves to just a couple of sentences.” It is especially wise to emphasize brevity in a very large group; the opportunity to speak in a large group can be irresistible to impassioned people who yearn for an audience.

*It is especially wise to emphasize brevity in a very large group; the opportunity to speak in a large group can be irresistible to impassioned people who yearn for an audience.*

Consider having refreshments available upon adjournment of the full group. After participating in a small group dialogue within a larger group, people are sometimes interested in continuing the conversation with other members of their small group, with friends who were in different groups, or perhaps with someone who has shared reflections at the end.

### 4.4.2 Is it necessary to have facilitators in each of the small groups?

It is necessary to have one person in each group who will, at a minimum, take responsibility for leading the group through a written agenda, keeping an eye on time, speaking up if agreements are clearly violated, and ensuring that the group is prepared for a reflection session in the large group if that is part of the plan. In some situations the demands on the small group facilitators will be minimal; in others, the small group facilitators will need to be well-prepared and fairly skilled.

If you are uncertain about the level of skill or readiness of some of the small group facilitators (perhaps you’ve had a large turnout and you’ve recruited a few people on the spot), include in your opening remarks in the full group something like this: “A number of people have kindly volunteered to be facilitators in the break out groups. They’ll lead you through the agenda and keep track of time. We hope

that you will share with them responsibility for the quality of the conversation. We hope you'll adhere to the agreements as best you can and allow your facilitator to remind you if you forget the agreements. Let your facilitator know if you feel the conversation is off track or if it seems that the agreements have been forgotten."

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#### 4.4.3 How can I help the small group facilitators prepare for their role?

In addition to sharing this guide with them (especially Sections 4.4, 5.1, and 6), you may wish to meet with them before the dialogue to: (1) go over the plan; (2) hear about their concerns and brainstorm about how to handle challenges; (3) discuss objectives for mutual learning and or/support among the facilitators; (4) make plans to debrief after the session.

You will need to decide together which of the opening remarks and processes you will handle in the full group. For example, will you finalize the communication agreements in the large group, or will each small group facilitator do that in their group? The first option is most efficient but it may discourage people from speaking up if they are uncertain or reticent about the proposed agreements. In addition, if concerns are handled in small groups, the whole group won't be delayed by the needs of only one or two people who need to clarify or revise them.

*Other things being equal, we recommend that you cover as much orientation as possible in the large group.*

Other things being equal, we recommend that you cover as much orientation as possible in the large group. This allows everyone to be oriented in the same way by a lead facilitator who has carefully prepared the opening remarks. One disadvantage of this, however, is that some newcomers may miss the opening remarks. This possibility can be addressed by having the small group facilitators check in

with their group saying, e.g., "Does anyone have any questions about the introductory remarks that you just heard?" and (if relevant), "Was everyone here for them?"

At the end of the small group sessions, the facilitators will need to know what participants are expected to bring back to the full group. Will one person from each group be asked to share some headlines, without attribution to individual speakers (unless they have permission)? Or will participants simply be told that there will be a brief re-convening of the full group at which time individuals will have to opportunity to briefly say something, if they wish, about their experience of the dialogue or what they are taking away—for example, a new understanding, question, idea or commitment)?

Unless there is a need for representative reports from each small group to the full group, individual reflections are recommended over group reports. Group reports can be tedious and repetitive, especially if there are more than three or four. There is also a risk that the reporters will represent the contributions of others poorly.

#### 4.4.4 How can I efficiently divide a large group into small groups?

There are many ways to do this. You can have people count off or you can give out nametags that have group numbers written on them. Although completely random assignments will likely yield somewhat diverse groups, it is worth your effort to use what you know to maximize diversity in the small groups. For example, if you know something about the perspectives of twenty of the sixty people you expect, and you are forming ten groups of six, you can pre-assign two in each group with diversity in mind and then fill out the groups with random assignments.

#### 4.4.5 How many people should be in each small group?

If you can limit the group size to five or six, do so. When small groups have more participants, it takes longer to bring them together and each go-round takes longer. If the dialogue is a typical evening event, and there are eight or more participants in each small group, you'll run the risk of leaving no time for less structured discussion, or even not finishing the opening go-rounds.

#### 4.4.6 How should I handle the likely latecomers in a large, public event?

If the lead facilitator (i.e. the person working with the whole group) intends to also facilitate a small group, she should make sure there is a designated "gatekeeper" who can take latecomers aside to orient them, go over agreements, and then either assign them to one of the existing small groups or cluster them into a new small group. The latter is less disruptive but not always possible. The "gatekeeper" can also monitor time and call back the small groups at the appropriate time, perhaps with a two-minute warning.

#### 4.4.7 How should I set up the room(s)?

You will want to ensure that the room is comfortable, in terms of physical and auditory space, for the number of participants that you are expecting. We recommend that the small groups have chairs set up in a circle, ensuring that each person can see every other member of the group.

Do not underestimate the need for space around each small group. It will be very hard for people to hear in their small group if another small group is just five feet away, especially if the group is seated around a large table and unable to "huddle" together.

We generally don't use tables, but since some groups may prefer to meet around a table, especially if they want to have food or refreshments during the dialogue, their wishes should be honored if the space between the tables is adequate and the tables are not too large.

Function room tables designed for eight to ten people are usually too big unless there is plenty of space around each one.

When setting up the chairs for the full group, try to maximize participants' opportunities to see each other. If you are working with a very large group (more than sixty people), a theatre-style set up may be necessary, but in that case you can curve it into a horseshoe shape.

■ *Do not underestimate the need for space around each group.*

When working with large groups, it is ideal to have adjacent “breakout” rooms. If you have only one room to work with, the full group can meet in the middle of the front of the room, and small groups can gather in the corners or around the perimeter. If you have plenty of chairs, you can arrange one set of chairs for the participants to sit in at the beginning and the end of the program, as a full group, and have other chairs pre-arranged for the small groups. With such a set-up, no furniture has to be moved when people move from the full to the small groups and back again. If you do need to move chairs, you can mark the places to which the groups will be asked to move their chairs with numbers or letters.

## 4.5 Designing a Session to Incorporate a Common Stimulus

### 4.5.1 How can I incorporate movies, readings, guest presenters, or another common stimulus into a dialogue program?

Asking the participants to reflect on a common stimulus can have several advantages. The common experience can be informative and somewhat “leveling” for people who have different amounts of background knowledge. It can also help people to warm up to talking with each other about particular issues. Multi-session groups often hold sessions that make use of readings, films, and so forth.

If you plan to use a common stimulus we offer these recommendations:

#### Choice of Stimulus

The stimulus should be as balanced and non-polemical as possible. If you invite a guest speaker or speakers, brief them ahead of time about how their presentation can contribute to establishing an atmosphere for the dialogue. For example, you can ask them to model speaking for themselves and connecting their beliefs and ideas with their life experience. You can ask them to be open about their uncertainties and the complexities of their views. And you can ask them to avoid making grand “pronouncements” or offering heady analyses that may be inaccessible to some participants. Speeches that are highly academic or meant to be persuasive are valuable in some contexts, but not as catalysts for dialogue.

#### Introductory Remarks

At the beginning of the session encourage participants to think of the stimulus, not as the topic of their dialogue or as something to critique or support. Rather, ask them to think of it as a shared experience that can help them “warm up” to reflecting on their own thoughts and feelings about the issues, and to becoming interested in how others are grappling with the same questions and issues.

You might want to preview the questions you will be asking before presenting the stimulus, if you think that doing so will guide people’s listening in a helpful way. (For example, let people know that you’ll be asking: What had special meaning for you? What surprised you? What challenged your usual ways of thinking about the issue?)

#### Transition from Stimulus to Dialogue

After the stimulus, help participants make a transition from relating to the stimulus to relating to each other. If a stimulus is emotionally provocative, it is especially helpful to have transition time. This transition time can take the form of a break—an informal time when people can get up and stretch and talk with someone they know or reflect silently. Alternatively, you can invite them to pair up with one

other person and give each person a couple of minutes to speak about his or her thoughts and feelings, while their partner listens silently, without response, critique, or advice. For ideas about questions to pose after a common stimulus, see Section 7.5.

When considering using a common stimulus in a single-session dialogue, two caveats are in order.

- 1) Be realistic about time. It can be challenging to offer a satisfying dialogue experience if you have two hours or less, especially with a large group or a group whose size and composition is not known ahead of time. If a stimulus takes more than twenty to thirty minutes, it is even harder to fit everything in.
- 2) In a community that is painfully divided, if you have only one evening, the common stimulus might not be worth the extra time pressure it adds to your plan. In such a situation, make sure to:
  - create a relaxed atmosphere with adequate time for laying the foundation
  - encourage personal connections in an introductory go-round
  - schedule in plenty of time for the opening questions and for some less structured conversation

■ *After the stimulus, help participants make a transition from relating to the stimulus to relating to each other.*







## 5. Getting Ready for the Session

### 5.1 Emotional Preparation and Team Building

#### 5.1.1 How can I prepare myself emotionally to serve the group well?

If you are asking this question, you have already taken the first step in getting prepared! You have recognized that your role as the facilitator will be to serve the participants. You have also recognized that it may be challenging to stay grounded when the topic is emotionally charged for the participants and possibly for you as well.

First, you may find it helpful to discuss your own feelings and viewpoints about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict with friends, family, or associates. This may lessen any frustration you feel when playing a role that requires you to hold back from contributing your own ideas to the conversation.

Second, think about your personality and about your strengths and your weaknesses as a facilitator. Figure out strategies that enable you to rely on your strengths and minimize your weaknesses. For example:

- If you know that you're shy about intervening, role-play interventions with someone you trust to give you candid feedback.
- If you know that particular personal traits or viewpoints could “push your buttons,” prepare yourself to find something you appreciate—or at least understand—in someone who has those traits or viewpoints.
- If you like predictability, envision yourself as a nurturing and flexible guide, going on a journey with the group. Your job is not to know the destination or even the route, but to help people steer away from ruts and cliffs and toward territory that is somewhat unfamiliar, but also hospitable.

*If you like predictability, envision yourself as a nurturing and flexible guide, going on a journey with the group. Your job is not to know the destination or even the route, but to help people steer away from ruts and cliffs and toward territory that is somewhat unfamiliar, but also hospitable.*

#### 5.1.2 How can I get support to prepare emotionally and develop skills?

You might want to work with a co-facilitator or bring together a network of facilitators who can help each other to prepare emotionally and develop skills. (See Section 1.5.)

With your co-facilitator or support network you can discuss any concerns you have about an upcoming dialogue and brainstorm about ways to handle both common challenges and your own personal “nightmare” scenario. You can also role-play ways of responding to various challenges. If you have a network of facilitators, you can role-play entire dialogues in which you take turns being the participant or the facilitator. This will allow you to learn from both positions.

You can also look for opportunities to learn in your everyday life. For example, go with a friend to a local town meeting, a dialogue, or another event that involves discussion of different viewpoints. Talk afterward

about what you saw as the purpose of the conversation and what you noticed the conveners or facilitators did—preventively or through intervention—to help people achieve that purpose. Think about what you might have done differently.

After you facilitate a dialogue, discuss with your co-facilitator and/or people in your network: what happened, how you understood it, what you did, what assumptions you based your decisions on, what you think you did well and what you might have done differently. If you have co-facilitated, be sure to discuss how you felt about the ways you worked together.

### 5.1.3 How can my co-facilitator and I prepare to work well together?

#### Assess compatibility

Before committing to working together, talk about your style, your general approach, the principles you hold dear, and the hopes and expectations you would bring to the work. If you have fundamentally different ways of facilitating, it's best to learn that ahead of time so the participants don't bear the brunt of their facilitation team's inconsistency or tension.

#### Anticipate challenges and discuss possible responses

Discuss your concerns about what might happen and how you would respond in various scenarios. If you each have a “nightmare” scenario, you can role-play them and give each other feedback. Talk not only about the interventions you favor, but also about the assumptions or principles that underlie them. As you discuss possible challenges, also make sure to consider strategies for prevention.

#### Clarify each of your roles

Explicit decisions about roles will help you prepare in a more focused way, reduce anxiety, and prevent

*Explicit decisions about roles will help you prepare in a more focused way, reduce anxiety, and prevent misunderstandings.*

misunderstandings. Decide who will play what role over the course of the dialogue. For example, will one of you make welcoming remarks and the other go over the proposed agreements? Will one of you pose the first go-round question and the other pose the second? What is expected of the facilitator who is not “on.” For example, will that person monitor time? Will you both attend to the agreements at all times and intervene as appropriate?

#### Learn about each other's preferences regarding mutual support

Discuss how you can help each other to be as focused and emotionally prepared as possible. For example, does one of you “warm up” well by being at the door welcoming people as they come in, while the other needs to steal away for a few minutes of stillness and quiet before doing the work? Talk candidly about what constitutes, for you, supportive vs. overly protective or intrusive “help.” Discuss previous co-facilitation experiences that went particularly well or badly and what worked or didn't work for you.

#### Discuss what it means to you to “co-facilitate”

Most co-facilitators work in a very flexible and collaborative way. While they assign primary roles for certain tasks — like posing a go-round question or introducing the less structured segment of the conversation—they also welcome each other to add comments, and they see each other as equally “on” for interventions of all sorts. Others want the co-facilitator who is not “on” to become active only if they feel something is going wrong, and then, with a request like, “May I make a suggestion?” The latter approach is most common when one facilitator is working in front of a large group, in which case it can be

distracting or undermining if the co-facilitator has a very low threshold for jumping in from the sidelines.

### **Decide about seating**

Talk about where you should each place yourselves in the room. Some co-facilitators like to have different vantage points on the group. Others like to sit next to each other so that they can confer more easily, if necessary. Sitting together also means that the participants won't have to look back and forth if they want to catch a facilitator's attention. Similarly, when working with a large group, you may want your co-facilitator to be at or near the front of the room with you, so that she can offer additions and suggestions more naturally than if she were at the back of the room—like back seat driving!

### **Commit to debriefing**

Knowing that you have made a commitment to debriefing and learning together may help you feel more focused during the dialogue. If the session is in the evening and it ends too late to have a full discussion, talk briefly while the experience is fresh and set another time for a more complete conversation.

## **5.1.4 What questions should we address when we debrief?**

Here are some suggestions:

- What went well?
- What questions or dilemmas came up for you?
- What would you do differently, if you could start over with this group?
- What did you like or not like about your own handling of your role?
- What skills did you most admire in your co-facilitator?
- What constructive feedback do you have for each other?
- In what ways did you work well together, or not?
- What did you learn that may help you design or facilitate a future meeting?
- Are there questions and concerns that merit particular efforts to get participants' feedback, beyond what you had already planned?

## 5.2 Decisions You Will Need to Make

### 5.2.1 As the date approaches, what should I be sure to have decided?

Here is a checklist:

#### Roles and Expectations

- If you have a co-facilitator, how do you want to share responsibilities and offer each other support? Who will bring the handouts, name tags, or other supplies?
- If you are working with a convener or planning group, is there anything you want them to do, or that they would like to do? For example, will a convener offer welcoming words and introduce you?
- Do you need to confirm plans with anyone else, such the person who will unlock the building or bring supplies or refreshments?

#### Room Set-up and Seating

- Will you be able to set up a circle of chairs of roughly equal height and comfort? Will participants need to be able to see a flip chart on a wall? Will you need an easel? Will all of your written material be on handouts?
- Do you have enough space? How many break-out rooms will you need?
- Will you ask people to seat themselves in a particular way? (Section 4.1.7)
- If you are co-facilitating, will you sit next to your co-facilitator?

#### Preparing Your Plan or “Script”

- Have you made the scripted portions of your plan “yours,” so you can speak naturally and connect with participants in a relaxed way?
- Have you prepared materials with enough detail to help you stay on track but not so much that you may be overwhelmed by too many papers in your lap?
- Have you timed out your plan so you will have realistic expectations regarding the ending time?
- Have you noted the time by which you will need to transition to the closing in order to end on time?
- Have you considered what a “Plan B” would be, in case more people show up, the meeting starts late, etc. For example, if time is an issue, will you condense three go-rounds into two or skip one?

#### Greeting

- How will you greet people? (Keep in mind that if final preparations are left until the last minute, it’s easy to lose track of the importance of greeting people warmly at the door.)
- Will you offer refreshments? (See Section 3.5.4.)

- Will you ask the participants to wear name tags? (This is highly recommended unless all the participants and facilitators know each other well.)

### **The Opening Segment**

- If there are conveners or hosts, what will you ask of them? For example, would you like a convener or host to welcome people and then introduce you? If so, how would you like to be introduced?
- Is there anything about the facility that needs to be mentioned, such as where to find bathrooms?
- Are there acknowledgements you'd like to make in your opening comments, for example, regarding the help you've received in the planning process?
- Have you prepared a list of proposed agreements as a handout, or on easel paper, or both?
- Have you decided how you will ask people to introduce themselves? (The sample formats in Chapter 7 offer some ideas.)
- How will you introduce yourself as the facilitator? (See Section 4.1.15)
- Will you participate in the introductory go-round?

### **The Body of the Dialogue**

- What opening questions will you use? If you are creating new questions, how well do they meet the suggested criteria in Sections 4.1.10 and 4.1.11? (See also Section 2.7.)
- Will you present the questions verbally only or also in a handout (see Appendix C) or on easel paper? The longer and more complex the questions, the more important it is to provide a written cue to help participants consider the question fully.
- How will you open the less structured portion of the dialogue? Will you give written as well as verbal guidance—by distributing the handout presented in Appendix K, for example? If you and a co-facilitator have decided that you'll wait until you see how the early part of the dialogue goes before deciding how much structure to use toward the end, how will you make that decision? Will one of you take the lead? Will you build in a coffee break during which you can discuss what you'll do next?

### **Closing the Dialogue**

- How will you close the session? (The sample formats in Chapter 7 offer some options.)
- Will the group need to address any questions about next steps? If so, how much time should you save for that? Are there particular procedures for possible next steps that should be investigated ahead of time?
- Are there any acknowledgements you want to include in your parting comments?

## Feedback and Follow Up

- What will you say or do about feedback and follow up? Will you prepare written feedback forms? Will you want to have phone calls with participants?
- Do you need to gather participants' contact information, or convenient times to call them? If so, will you pass around a sign up sheet at the end? (If someone suggests sharing the list with the group, make sure that's OK with everyone.)

## 5.3 Supplies and Materials

### 5.3.1 What supplies and materials will I need?

- Your plan or “script,” i.e., your customized version of a format with questions
- Nametags (if group members do not already know each other)
- Name cards for chairs (if you plan to assign seats)
- Handouts and/or a flip chart with
  - the proposed agreements (see Appendix J)
  - any questions you have decided to pose not only verbally but also in writing (see Appendix C for a sample)
  - guidance for the less structured conversation, if you would like to present that in writing as well as verbally (see Appendix K)
- Pens or pencils for participants to take notes, as well as pads or pieces of blank paper
- Markers and masking tape if you anticipate using and hanging flipcharts
- Whatever you need to keep time (e.g. a timer or watch)
- For large groups, materials needed to make group assignments and direct people to their small groups, and perhaps, a bell to call people back to the full group.
- A copy or copies of the invitation or flyer (in case it will be helpful for quickly orienting or re-orienting a participant. See Section 6.5.3)
- Tissues (unscented)
- Feedback forms (see Appendix E.)



## 6. Facilitating the Dialogue

If your pre-meeting work has ensured that participants arrive with a clear sense of shared purpose and a readiness to make agreements to support that purpose, you will probably find that facilitating the dialogue is reasonable easy (and enjoyable!). Nonetheless, unforeseen situations and challenges can arise.

There are many styles of facilitation. The first section of this chapter (6.1) provides reminders about the role of the facilitator in PCP's general approach to dialogue facilitation. Section 6.2 provides guidance about intervention. Section 6.3 offers ideas about responding to particular challenges. Section 6.4 focuses on time management. The last section addresses issues that may arise in multi-session groups.

You will find a one-page summary of many of the key tips presented in this chapter in Appendix M, "Facilitation Challenges: Prevention and Response."

### 6.1 What Facilitators Do and Don't Do in a PCP-style Dialogue

#### 6.1.1 What will my role be as the facilitator in a dialogue using the Public Conversations Project approach?

Your role as the facilitator is to support the participants in achieving the purposes that they set out to achieve. This will probably require little intervention on your part, if you enter the room with:

- a commitment to participant ownership of the conversation (see Chapter 2)
- participants who are well-prepared for dialogue (see Chapter 3)
- a meeting design that reflects the participants' hopes and that includes clear agreements, helpful structures, and purposeful questions (see Chapter 4)
- adequate preparation, staffing, and supplies (see Chapter 5)

#### 6.1.2 What will my central responsibilities be?

To help the participants

- pursue or explicitly revise the purposes and goals that brought them together
- honor or explicitly revise their communication agreements
- stay focused on questions and issues that serve their purposes
- use the available time in a purposeful manner

### 6.1.3 What are the most important things for me to remember when I'm facilitating?

- *Remember what your role is.*  
Your role is to help the participants to achieve their purposes and honor their communication agreements. If a group's purposes shift or if the agreements no longer serve their purposes, your role is to help the group to regain clarity and/or make appropriate revisions.
- *Be positive.*  
Assume good intentions and avoid shaming judgments. Sometimes a simple comment or re-direction addresses an "infraction," for example, taking too much time or interrupting. Examples: "I'd like to check in and see if someone who hasn't spoken would like to..." or "John, I'm not sure Marty was finished . . ."
- *Share responsibility for managing dilemmas with the group.*  
You can simply share the dilemma and ask for input, or you can share the dilemma and make a suggestion. Example: "We only have fifteen minutes until our ending time and I'm aware that we haven't yet gotten to a couple of questions that you said you wanted to address. How would you like to handle that?" or "Would it work for you to end at 9:15 instead of 9:00?" or "Would it make sense to save those questions for next time?"
- *Be open to checking out your perceptions and assumptions.*  
If you think a problem needs to be named and addressed, but it's not a straightforward violation of an agreement, check out your perception of what is happening and your assumption about how it might be affecting the group. Example: "I've noticed . . . Has anyone else noticed that? How is that working for you?"
- *Intervene in a way that takes account of the group's development and your own strengths and weaknesses.*  
If you think your style might be a bit "loose and easy," guard against being too loose at the beginning. Otherwise you will establish problematic precedents, such as individuals taking up too much time or interrupting each other. If you think you might be too quick to intervene over very minor issues, loosen up a little as the group develops trusting and caring relationships.

### 6.1.4 What should I avoid doing?

Sometimes people who use PCP's approach to facilitation find that they are being encouraged not only to do things that they haven't done before, but also to refrain from doing things they do in other contexts—as leaders, teachers, mediators, or therapists for example. You undoubtedly will draw on many of the skills you have developed in other settings, for example, establishing a vibrant contact with group members, tracking the discussion, and engaging participant interest. However, we recommend that you avoid the following:

- *Being the "expert" or the center of attention.*  
A successful facilitator in a dialogue using PCP's approach is typically one who has some skills and experience but does not need to be a star or expert. Rather, he or she relates to participants in a respectful, appreciative and collaborative manner, and knows when to be active and when to be quiet or "get out of the way."
- *Being overly responsible for the "success" of the dialogue.*  
If you have a concern or a dilemma, don't feel that you need to know the answer or fix the problem. Raise your concern, see if participants share it, and if they do, discover what ideas they have about



addressing it. If you have recommendations about the process, offer them in ways that model constructive handling of dilemmas and give participants practice at naming and resolving dilemmas for themselves.

- *Being the primary energizer.*

The kind of energy that you bring to groups in other arenas of your life (activism or speech-making, for example) may not be suitable for dialogue facilitation. You should bring positive energy to your role as facilitator. If you feel you need to infuse energy and enthusiasm in a particular group, however, this may be a sign that the participants are marginally committed, confused, or frustrated. If you are concerned about the interest level of the participants, ask about it, don't try to compensate for it or disguise it.

- *Focusing on one participant's personal needs at the expense of the group.*

No matter how compelling you find an individual's needs or hopes, you will need to balance your concern about the individual with your concern for the group. If you are accustomed to playing an individual counseling role, this may require a stretch.

## **6.2 Interventions: The Basics**

### **6.2.1 What should I do if a participant forgets to observe an agreement?**

The agreements are crucial for creating a respectful and safe space for dialogue; they protect the spirit of dialogue. If a participant has clearly forgotten to observe an agreement, you must intervene. It is especially important to intervene at the very beginning of a dialogue session so that participants will trust that the agreements, and your role in upholding them, are being taken seriously.

Remember that no facilitator is perfect. If you let a significant violation of an agreement slip by, and later it seems that this has impacted the group or some members of the group, mention it, apologize for letting it go, and say why you think it's important to acknowledge or remember it now.

### **6.2.2 If I need to intervene, how should I do it?**

Intervene with legitimacy and compassion.

### **6.2.3 What constitutes a "legitimate" intervention?**

An intervention is legitimate (not guided by facilitator bias or whim) if an agreement has been violated. It is also legitimate if the dialogue is moving in a direction that is not consonant with the agreed upon purpose. In this case, your job is to raise this concern and assist the participants to either return to or re-negotiate its purpose.

It may be difficult to tell whether an agreement is being violated. If you are uncertain, ask the group.

### 6.2.4 What constitutes a “compassionate” intervention?

An intervention is compassionate when it is offered in a manner that gives the benefit of the doubt to the participant and does not shame any of the participants. There are many ways you can extend this benefit.

- **You can make simple interventions that don’t overtly name a violation.** This is only recommended if the infraction is minor and does not indicate a larger pattern that must be named and addressed. In the case of occasional interrupting, a simple intervention would be, *“Excuse me, Mary, I want to see if John was finished.”*
- **You can suggest a positive direction rather than simply naming an infraction.** For example, if Howard begins his statement with a judgment of David’s response, he is violating the agreement about refraining from criticism. If he says, for example, *“Well, David, it’s not going to get us anywhere if you just carry on about ...”* or *“David, I can’t believe you are so blind to...”* you can intervene with, *“Howard, would you be willing to just say what you think makes sense without criticizing what David said?”* or *“Rather than calling David blind, could you just say what you see that you think is really important? Then, if you want, you can ask David if he sees that as well and, if so, how he sees it.”*
- **Instead of making a quick judgment that may be based on a misreading of the situation, you can inquire about what you are hearing.** For example, suppose Susan’s comments in two go-rounds strongly suggest (in your mind) that anyone who doesn’t agree with her is immoral or dangerously unrealistic. Susan hasn’t directly criticized another participant or what someone has said; nonetheless, her tone and some of her language makes you feel uncertain about whether she is implicitly insulting the intelligence and morality of those who have expressed different views. You can express curiosity about the needs of the group by saying, *“Susan, it sounds like you have really strong feelings about this. How are those of you who have different views hearing what Susan is saying? Are you feeling criticized or shut down or are you still able to listen? How is your resilience holding up?”* By taking this approach, you remain squarely in the role of servant to the group. You give the speaker a chance to reflect on how she’s presenting her point of view. You also give others a chance to give her feedback about the impact of her speaking. Finally, you are “walking the talk” by modeling inquiry and resisting the impulse to assume knowledge of others’ intentions or feelings.
- **You can acknowledge what is valuable, appropriate, or understandable about what is going on.** For example, *“When a conversation gets this energetic and fast-paced it’s often hard not to interrupt. How about slowing down a bit and raising your hand when you want to speak?”*

### 6.2.5 Is upholding the agreements my only legitimate function?

No, you should also help the group to stay focused. If in your opening comments you stated a purpose that reflected the participants’ wishes and presented a plan for the session that they accepted, you can legitimately help them to either stay focused on the plan or explicitly alter it.

For example, if the participants have set out to address a particular issue and they talk for quite a while about another issue, check in with them. For example, *“You started with a focus on x and now the topic seems to be y. Is that what you want to address tonight?”*

*You can also serve the group by helping individual participants stay focused.*

You can also serve the group by helping individual participants stay focused. For example, if Joan responds to a question in a way that seems unrelated, don’t assume that her response is unrelated. Ask. For example, you can say:

“Joan, I’m having trouble connecting what you’re saying with the question. Can you help me make the connection?” Joan may explain what the connection is or she may realize that she has lost track of the question. This is easy to do, especially toward the end of a go-round when one’s mind may be filled with thoughts and feelings related to what other people have said rather than the question. If this is the case, Joan may ask to be reminded of the question, or you can remind her. (If the questions are posted or written on a handout, this will help some participants stay focused.)

### **6.2.6 What if someone speaks out of turn in a go-round?**

Sometimes a participant will feel compelled to speak out of turn, often with good intentions. For example, someone might say, “*Oh, I just have to give a great example of what you just said,*” or, “*Can I just respond quickly?*” or, “*Oh, I saw that show, too, and I thought it was so....*” If this happens, the facilitator can say, “*Ellen, this part works best if we stick to the format. Will you hold onto that thought, until we complete the go-round? You can jot it down and bring it up later.*”

### **6.2.7 Is it really OK for me to interrupt someone?**

Not only is it OK, but you have to be willing to interrupt in order to play the role of facilitator. If this is a challenge for you, you may want to tell participants explicitly at the beginning of the session: “*To do my job I may have to interrupt someone, much as I hate to do it. I hope you’ll understand.*” Of course, if you interrupt a participant during a timed go-round, make sure the participant still gets her full speaking time.

In some cases, you can wait to intervene until the participant has finished, especially if you are not sure whether or not an agreement has been violated. At other times, you will have to interrupt in order to stop another participant from being hurt.

### **6.2.8 How should I facilitate the less structured part of the dialogue?**

You may choose to be fairly structured, e.g., inviting only questions and answers for much of this time, or you may choose to say very little beyond your initial instructions regarding the four “pathways to connected conversation” (See Appendix K). Your choice should be determined by what you know at that point about the group. Is this a group that might find it hard to be curious about each other, follow the agreements, refrain from impulsive interruption, etc.? If so, more structure is recommended. If it’s a group that seems very comfortable with the spirit and practice of dialogue, they will need less structure. Keep in mind that even a group that needs little structure can benefit from some.

## 6.3 Responding to Particular Concerns and Challenges

### 6.3.1 What if the conversation takes a direction that seems problematic to me?

If you notice a pattern in the group that seems problematic, you can comment on what you notice and ask what people think. Examples:

- *“We’re about half way through our discussion time, and I notice that we’ve stayed focused on Dan’s question about X. That may be fine with everyone, but I want to check to see if any of you were hoping to ask another question.”*
- *“Ruth, it sounds like you have a lot to share about X, but I want to check in with others to see if there are other topics people wanted to address before our time winds down.”*
- *“The conversation has been going at a really fast pace among you three, and I wonder if you (other) three are having a hard time getting a word in or are just choosing to listen right now.”*
- *“For the past two sessions, even though we started with questions about your different viewpoints on the situation in Israel, much of the discussion has focused on your common concerns about anti-Semitism. That’s OK, but I’d like to just remind you about where you started and see if you want to be where you are or if you want to shift back to the questions we started with.” Alternatively: “When we began the series, you seemed eager to explore your differences but I’ve noticed lots of discussion of similarities. Have you noticed that? (If so) How do you understand that?”*

### 6.3.2 What if no one says something for a while?

If participants in a dialogue are quiet for more than a few seconds, it can be tempting to jump in and offer a question or suggestion. We recommend that you hold yourself back. Silent moments can be quite fruitful and a sign that participants are doing the work of dialogue: reflecting, considering how they want to speak before speaking, holding back from immediate reactions so they can decide what a more intentional response would be, or just taking in a fresh and new conversation.

### 6.3.3 What if some participants speak much more than others?

During the opening go-rounds, participation is likely to be fairly equal unless some people pass or offer especially brief responses. That is one of many advantages of beginning with go-rounds. It is during the less structured portions of the dialogue that “air time” may be an issue. Your job as a facilitator is not to make sure that everyone speaks for exactly the same amount of time, but to create conditions that are welcoming of all voices. Extroverts will tend to speak a bit more than introverts, and this will be true until the end of time. Your job is to make sure the extroverts leave enough space for the introverts.

In many (though not all) groups, men tend to speak more than women, and people with higher social or economic status or more formal education sometimes speak more than those with less. Older people may speak more than younger people. These differences may also affect who is listened to attentively. You may be so accustomed to these patterns in everyday life that you don’t even notice them. We recommend that you try to be aware of such patterns and create space where space may be needed. This can be as simple as saying, *“Before going on I’d like to just see if anyone who hasn’t yet spoken would like to speak,”* or, *“Our time*

*will come to an end soon, so I want to check in with you two, Sheila and Andrea, to see if you had something you wanted to say or if you're doing fine with just listening now.*" This "creates space" but doesn't put pressure on anyone to participate.

We also recommend that you allow enough time for silent pauses after posing questions for a go-round, so that people who feel less comfortable with speaking in public can gather their thoughts.

### **6.3.4 What if there are very different levels of knowledge about history and current events?**

This is a very common situation in dialogue sessions about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. If you and the group are committed to the spirit and purpose of dialogue, you will guard against the dialogue being transformed into an educational offering by the most learned member(s) of the group. This can happen if the people who have acquired the most information seek to impart their learning to the others, and as a result, speak at great length. Even if they are acting in good faith, and sincerely trying to respect the purpose of the dialogue, this can create an environment where others are afraid to speak about their own perspectives. Sometimes the less informed participants are sincerely more interested in listening than speaking. By acting like learners, they encourage others to act like teachers. A self-reinforcing dynamic with "talkers" and "listeners" can also develop when one or two participants have a background or a political perspective that is very different from those of the other participants. (See the next section.)

There are several things you can do to support a spirit of dialogue in these situations:

- **Begin with questions that everyone can answer—questions about people's life experiences, hopes and concerns.** (This is standard practice for PCP and JDG.) Good opening questions contribute to creating a space where everyone can be heard and listened to with interest and respect. In this environment, the most learned member of the group can learn something new, if not about facts and figures, then about the ways that people with different experiences make sense of what they know in very different ways.
- **If participants offer their knowledge in sweeping statements, encourage them to ground what they are saying in their own experience, direct or indirect.** You can refer back to the agreement about speaking for oneself. This agreement is sometimes expanded to include language like: "We will avoid grand pronouncements in favor of statements that connect what we know to particular sources of information or experiences."
- **Keep in mind that an ongoing group can fruitfully develop ways to integrate educational goals into their dialogue goals, but they should do this intentionally.** For example, in a multi-session dialogue, if participants have had time to get to know about each other's perspectives and experiences, and to see that everyone has something to offer and something to learn, it is not necessarily counter to the goals of dialogue for some participants to occasionally take on roles of teacher and learner. But that shift should only happen if that works for all members of the group. If a group has gradually shifted in that direction, and you are not certain that it's working for everyone, be sure to share what you notice and ask the group members about how they'd like to proceed.

### 6.3.5 Can the group work simultaneously toward both educational goals and dialogue goals?

One of the common fruits of ongoing dialogue is the surfacing of questions for which the participants realize they don't have answers. This may be because it's easier to acknowledge the limits of one's knowledge in a setting where curiosity and open-mindedness have been explicitly valued.

Yes, particularly in an ongoing or multi-session group. One of the common fruits of ongoing dialogue is the surfacing of questions for which the participants realize they don't have answers. This may be because it's easier to acknowledge the limits of one's knowledge in a setting where curiosity and open-mindedness have been explicitly valued. If an ongoing group is interested in learning together—about the history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, for example—they can decide to discuss readings or films or organize educational events.

It's more difficult to pursue dual goals in a single session, but it can be done if the group is not polarized. In very polarized communities it's best to focus on dialogue goals first. (See Section 4.5 on using a common stimulus like a reading or video.)

### 6.3.6 What if one person's perspective is quite different from all the others'?

*When someone has a different viewpoint from the rest, it makes that person both particularly valuable for the diversity of viewpoint that they can bring and particularly vulnerable to feeling on the spot.*

As indicated in Section 3.6.3, having an “isolate” can create a challenging dynamic. An isolate may feel pushed into a spokesperson role by other participants who send all of their questions in her direction. Sometimes, the isolate may take on that role in an attempt to “equalize” the situation, e.g., by taking a large amount of airtime and/or speaking in a more persuasive style. The isolate's vulnerability is to feeling alone or a bit “ganged up” on. The greatest vulnerability for the group is that a polarization will emerge between the “comrades” and the “other,” and the participants will all lose the opportunity that dialogue offers to learn about each other's views and reflect on their own.

If you find yourself working with a group that has an isolate, and the group spends a great deal of time focusing on that person's viewpoint, you have some options.

- **You can speak privately to the individual during a break.**

Find out how she is feeling about the situation and if there's anything you or the group can do to take the pressure off and to encourage a more balanced discussion.

- **You can raise your concern with the full group.**

For example, you could say that when someone has a different viewpoint from the rest, it makes that person both particularly valuable for the diversity of viewpoint that they can bring, and particularly vulnerable to feeling on the spot. You could then say something like, “Dan, I hope you'll speak up if you're feeling like you're on the spot or like you are being asked to speak for others who aren't here. Remember that all of you are simply asked to speak for yourselves.” If you feel you need to say more you could say, “If all the questions are directed at Dan, this conversation might feel more like an interview than a dialogue and you'll lose the opportunity to explore the differences among you, even if they are smaller differences.” You could also remind Dan that he can pass, but chances are

good that a simple intervention will suffice.

If you discover that you have an isolate in the first meeting of a four or five session series, you can check in with the group at the end to see if they think the advantages of recruiting another member or two for the remaining sessions outweigh the disadvantages of having to take some time to integrate the new person or people.

### 6.3.7 Can I call for a break even if it wasn't planned?

Absolutely. If emotions are high, a break can allow people to calm down. Or, if you need to collect your thoughts about what is happening and what you want to do next, or if you want to check in privately with a participant or your co-facilitator, a break offers a perfect opportunity. You can call for a quick stretch break so that people can get out of their chairs and move around, or a longer break so that people can get refreshments, go to the bathroom, etc. You can also simply request a minute or two for quiet reflection if emotions are high. For example, you could say, *“It seems that the pace and intensity of the conversation has picked up quite a bit in the last ten or fifteen minutes. It might be good to just have a couple of quiet moments to take a deep breath or reflect quietly on the ideas and feelings that have been brought up. Would that be OK?”*

### 6.3.8 What if someone becomes very upset or tearful?

Speaking and listening about divisive issues that affect people's sense of safety and identity can be emotionally upsetting. It is rare for emotional responses to be so strong that they pose a dilemma for the facilitator. However, if the topic of the dialogue is one that invites participants to speak about their experiences of past trauma, some individuals may become upset, tearful, fearful, or angry.

The structure and spirit of a dialogue usually create an environment within which participants feel open-hearted with each other and resilient enough to stay engaged and focused if someone becomes very emotional. In fact, sometimes an expression of deep emotions takes the dialogue to a deeper level.

When feelings of grief or sadness arise, groups of people who know each other well will probably know what to do. They may offer support, for example, by taking the person's hand or making another gesture of comfort. In a group of people who do not know each other well, it may be harder to determine what is appropriate. Our advice is to keep your heart open and take your lead from the person who is upset. For example, simply ask, “What would be most helpful for you now?” Or you may want to suggest that the group take a break, allowing everyone to breathe and stretch. During the break, the person who is upset may choose to be alone, or they may accept or seek supportive contact from you or others. If the person who is upset has spoken about someone he has lost to violence, it may be appropriate for the group to take a moment of silence to honor that person's memory.

*The structure and spirit of a dialogue usually create an environment within which participants feel open-hearted with each other and resilient enough to stay engaged and focused if someone becomes very emotional. In fact, sometimes an expression of deep emotions takes the dialogue to a deeper level.*

Sometimes a participant who is consistently much more emotional than the others takes a disproportionate amount of the group's time and energy. As the facilitator, you should guard against being so concerned about one participant that you lose track of your need to serve the whole group in achieving its purpose for being together.

### 6.3.9 What if someone becomes very angry?

If a participant becomes so angry that he verbally attacks another participant, it is essential to intervene. It may be easiest to call for a break and talk to the person privately, especially if you think he will feel uncomfortable if spoken to in front of others. On the other hand, addressing the situation in the group has the advantages of being less disruptive and it is more transparently affirming of the agreements and your commitment to helping participants maintain them.

In either case, we suggest you begin simply by noting what has happened. For example, if Barry angrily criticizes Deborah's views, you might say, "Barry, excuse me, you just characterized Deborah's views as x..." He might immediately say, "Yeah, OK, I'm sorry Deborah, I got a little carried away." Or, you might need to say more, e.g., "That seems to fall outside of the communication agreements" or "I'm imagining that Deborah found that to be less than respectful, so let me check in with her."

### 6.3.10 How can I respond constructively to outbursts?

*Once you name the outburst as out of bounds, consider that it might represent an opportunity to examine the power and meaning of the issue for the person who has spoken, and to move to a deeper level of understanding and empathetic connection.*

Once you name the outburst as out of bounds, consider that it might represent an opportunity to examine the power and meaning of the issue for the person who has spoken, and to move to a deeper level of understanding and empathetic connection. This is not likely to happen, however, if you act uncomfortable with the emotions in the room!

In the case presented above, you will probably help the group and help Barry if you invite him to say what's most important to him—what's at the heart of the matter—about what he expressed. Ask him to try to speak about it without referring specifically to Deborah's views. Perhaps he'd like to say where the passion for that issue comes from, or what it is about his life experience that makes it so powerful.

Another approach is to check in with Barry not only about what he intended to express, but also with Deborah about how what Barry said impacted her. She might say that she felt misunderstood by Barry, in which case she will welcome an opportunity to clarify her views. Or she might say how it felt when Barry spoke to her, or spoke about her, in that manner. If Deborah experienced a negative *impact* from what Barry said, consider asking Barry to share his *intentions*. What did he mean? What did he want to convey? How did he hope his comment would be received?

When dialogue participants speak about what they've gained through dialogue, they sometimes mention a heightened awareness of the gap between their intentions and the impact of what they say.



### **6.3.11 What if someone repeatedly neglects to honor the agreements?**

In this situation, a break can be very useful. During the break, you can have a private conversation with the person who seems to be having trouble following the agreements and see if she wants to:

- stay (with renewed commitment to the agreements)
- leave (perhaps with an opportunity to say some parting words to the group)
- ask the group to re-negotiate the agreement that she finds hard to follow

If you or the participant decide that he or she needs to leave, acknowledge that it can be hard to know in advance how someone will experience the dialogue, and make sure to express that you appreciate him or her for giving it a try.

Consider calling the participant later to ask for his or her reflections on the experience and to see if there's anything you could have done to make it more satisfying. You can indicate that honest feedback will help you in the future, and also other people who want to conduct dialogues.

### **6.3.12 What if several people are having difficulty maintaining the spirit of the dialogue?**

A direct and honest approach is best. Share your perception with the group and ask the participants what their perceptions are. If they agree that there has been a mismatch between the agreements they made and the ways they are talking, you can ask what agreements would serve them best now. The group may re-commit to the original agreements or decide to modify them.

Remember that your job is to help people either honor or revise their agreements. In the unlikely event that the group wants to abandon their agreements and have a discussion with no rules, offer to bring the facilitated dialogue to a close after a closing go-round. In this situation, you might ask them questions like:

- *What was most satisfying and what was most unsatisfying about this way of speaking and listening?*
- *Are there any aspects of the dialogue process that you might want to incorporate into future conversations?*

If there are some participants who want to continue with a facilitated dialogue, they can re-start it as a smaller group at that moment or at another time.

### **6.3.13 What should I do if someone arrives late to a single-session dialogue?**

If a co-facilitator can take the person aside to orient him to the spirit of the dialogue and to go over the agreements, it will probably be fine to have him join late, especially if he hasn't missed much of the dialogue. If it is not practical to get the latecomer "caught up," it's best to explain that and offer to take his contact information so you can be in touch if another dialogue is planned.

## 6.4 Time Management

### 6.4.1 How can I help the participants use the time well?

There are two purposes of time management:

- to make sure that the conversation has a solid beginning, a long enough middle, and a satisfying end, within the time available
- to ensure that all participants have an equal opportunity to be heard, and that the dialogue is free from the domination or monopolization of airtime by any of the participants

Your job is to choose a way of shepherding people through the dialogue that accomplishes these purposes and also suits your style and your group's culture.

You can use an a digital kitchen timer, an easily readable watch, clock, or hour glass-style egg timer during the go-rounds in which people are invited to speak for up to three minutes. If you use an egg timer, we recommend that you have a second one on hand so that you can keep the process moving if a participant does not use the full three minutes and still has "sand" left in the top of the timer. If you intervene, you can adjust the time accordingly or pause your timer.

The Jewish Dialogue Group prefers to use a digital timer that beeps when someone's allotted time has elapsed. This takes some of the burden off the facilitator for stopping a speaker. In addition, some participants may prefer a beeping timer to a human voice because the timer seems more objective to them.

Whatever you decide about your means of timekeeping, be clear about what you are inviting participants to do (for example, "speak for up to three minutes") and how you plan to signal when their time is up. Indicate that a signal is a request to the participant to stop after completing his or her thought. If the speaker continues for more than a few more sentences, you can say, "*I'm afraid I need to stop you and move on.*"

If you are shy about intervening when a participant's time is up, you might want to say to the group at the outset, "*It's quite natural to lose track of time when you're speaking. As the facilitator here, I'll take it as my job to remind you about time. Even though I hate to interrupt people, I may do so. OK?*" (See Section 6.2.7.)

### 6.4.2 What should I do about time when there are no go-rounds?

After the go-rounds, at the start of the less structured conversation, you can remind participants about sharing time with others. You also can keep track of who speaks and invite the quieter participants to speak before all the time is used. During the less structured conversation, it's often helpful to let the group know when half the time gone or when there are only ten minutes left, especially if some people haven't yet spoken. This will help the participants to be more deliberate about how they use their time.

### 6.4.3 Can I ask the group to help me with managing time?

Yes. Especially if you are new to facilitating, without a co-facilitator, or concerned about your ability to monitor time as well as everything else, you can ask the participants to share responsibility for time

management. During the go-rounds, they can circulate a watch with an easily visible second hand. The watch follows the speaker. Ask the person who has just spoken to keep track of time for the person who speaks next. The proximity of the timekeeper to the speaker gives the timekeeper a gentle, non-verbal way of signaling that time is up: by simply handing the speaker the watch or placing a hand on his or her shoulder or arm. You can do the same thing with an egg timer.

Alternatively, you can ask one person to serve as timekeeper. That person holds the timer or watch and signals verbally and/or visually when each speaker's time is up. You can take over keeping time while that person speaks.

*One caveat:* If a participant is keeping track of time, he will probably not be able to listen as intently as the others. Therefore, in a dialogue that is likely to require the participants to work hard, it's best for the facilitator(s) to manage time without the participants' help.

## 6.5 Special Considerations for Multi-Session Groups

### 6.5.1 What should I do in the second meeting if someone has missed the first meeting?

This could occur, for example, if the group decides to expand after the first meeting or if a confirmed participant had to cancel at the last minute. In this case, design a format for the second meeting that allows time for personal introductions of all participants without repeating the entire agenda of the first meeting. For example, you can ask a slightly different introductory question than the one used in the first meeting, and ask if any participant who attended the first meeting would like to say something about what she took away from the first meeting.

### 6.5.2 What if someone misses a later session?

There are several ways you can help that person to rejoin the group. Suppose Bill has missed the second session.

- You can ask a volunteer to call Bill to fill him in. Asking at the beginning of the session will help the volunteer to be better prepared with notes than if you make the request at the end of the session.
- You can call Bill yourself to fill him in.
- At the next session you can say something like, "*Bill, we missed you last time. The central focus was X. Is there anyone who would like to share a highlight to help Bill re-enter at this point?*"

After a group has met several times, an absence is likely to be problematic only if the missed session represents a turning point of some kind or if the group discussed important decisions about its future.

### 6.5.3 What if people come late or leave early?

*If a substantive report seems necessary, it is best that by participants offer it in their own words.*

■ In most cases, you will need to take a few minutes when the latecomer arrives to sum up the plan for the dialogue and indicate where the group is in following that plan. We advise against giving a detailed summary of the substance of the conversation, since that runs the risk of leaving some participants feeling misunderstood or poorly represented. If a substantive report seems necessary, it is best that participants offer it in their own words. Of course, you

should add anything of procedural importance that the participants omit, such as a scheduling change.

### 6.5.4 What if someone stops attending a series?

If someone stops attending, we suggest that you call him. Express an interest in learning why he hasn't been coming and explain that you want to make sure he is OK. If a participant's absence was due to external factors and he will be returning, you can update him on the last session and talk about what it is planned for the next session.

If the reason for his absence is something that happened in the dialogue, you can ask for his candid feedback. For example: Is there something that you or other facilitators could have done differently? How does he want to leave things with the group? Is there anything he would like you to say to the group?

If a participant decides to drop out, you should not try to talk him into returning to the group. If you sense some ambivalence about the decision to leave, you can ask if there is there something you could do in the future that would lead him to want to re-join. If the participant decides to try again, make sure the decision is not the result of pressure. All participation should be voluntary.

### 6.5.5 What if participants want to continue to meet but don't agree on the group's future direction?

*Resist the impulse to try to "fix" the problem.*

■ Here you must resist the impulse to "fix" the problem. The participants will need to figure out if there are ways to meet diverging needs in the group as a whole or if it makes more sense to go separate ways. You can help by describing how other groups have dealt with this problem. For example, some groups have:

- converted themselves into a study group with readings and film
- mixed dialogue and education
- continued on with dialogue, but spun off a separate study group
- moved on from dialogue to planning actions
- convened a community-wide dialogue
- encouraged the formation of additional dialogue groups in the synagogue by offering a panel presentation

Presenting these choices may help the group to clarify its direction.

The most common split we've seen is between people who want to continue with the dialogue and people who want to identify common ground and engage in activism. Group members must accept that not everyone will want to engage in every proposed action. It can be useful to think about an ongoing dialogue group as a "safe harbor" for exploration of issues. Ships can sail out of this harbor to engage in action. These ships can carry a single member, a subset of the members, or the whole group. Only when all are on board should the ship sail with the "flag" of the dialogue group. Unless consensus is reached, members should not present themselves as representing the whole group.

### **6.5.6 What if the group seems ready to self-facilitate?**

Like mentors and parents, when facilitators become dispensable they can take it as a sign of a job well done. If the group seems ready to do without an outside facilitator, you can:

- Offer to talk with them about possible methods of self-facilitation. For example, you can suggest that group members take turns acting as the facilitator, perhaps in pairs. It is best not to eliminate this role altogether, at least for a transition period. If no one is responsible for tasks like monitoring agreements and use of time, the group may find itself in a situation where everyone is supposed to pay attention but no one does.
- Give them the handout, "Self Help Tools for Participants," which appears in this guide as Appendix I.
- Suggest that participants use a "time-out" signal to indicate if they are experiencing a need to stop and address a concern about the process. Otherwise, if three people signal through the usual body language that they want to say something, the facilitator won't know if one of those people has a concern about the process that should be addressed without delay. This is true for any facilitator. But when a facilitator is also participating, it is especially important for group members to find ways to share responsibility for the quality of their time together.
- Finally, suggest that they download this guide!





## 7. Sample Formats and Questions

This chapter includes step-by-step instructions for three different types of dialogue sessions. There are sample formats for:

- a single-session dialogue (7.1)
- an opening session for a multi-session dialogue (7.2)
- a generic design for later sessions in a series—you add the opening questions or opening exercise (7.3)

After these sample formats, you will find:

- an exercise on stereotyping that may be appropriate as a second session in a series (7.4)
- a list of suggested go-round questions that you can draw on when planning the later sessions in dialogue series (7.5)

You can use these formats exactly as they are, following the scripts word for word, or modify them to fit your style or your group's needs. The formats are laid out like lesson plans, with room for you to write in your own notes. It may be helpful to jot down any modifications to the plan you would like to make and, if there is more than one facilitator, to note who will do what.

The dialogue sessions outlined here take two to three hours. We have provided time estimates for each segment of the dialogue, assuming a group size of five or six. If your group is larger or smaller, make sure to recalculate the timing. You will also need to adjust the times if you decide to change the agenda by focusing more or less on a particular question or by adding or eliminating something.

### **The history of these formats and opening questions:**

The Public Conversations Project (PCP) has used the formats in 7.1. and 7.2 in many dialogue programs. PCP first developed the opening questions in 1990 for a dialogue that brought together pro-choice and pro-life activists. Since then, PCP has used them in dialogues on many other topics, including dialogues between Arabs and Jews and dialogues between environmental activists and people from the timber industry about the future of the Northern Forest. The Jewish Dialogue Group (JDG) began using these formats in dialogues about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in 2002.

PCP has also used the stereotyping exercise in Section 7.4 in many contexts and on many topics. PCP Associate Richard Chasin, MD, first developed this exercise for work between people from the Soviet Union and the United States at the height of the arms race, at Congresses of the International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War.

Many of the questions in Section 7.5 have also been used in dialogue programs over the past several years, while some represent new ideas for this guidebook.

## 7.1 A Sample Format for a Single-Session Dialogue: Exploring the Roots and Complexities of Our Perspectives

*Note: See Appendix C for a sample agenda (handout) for this session.*

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### WELCOME AND ORIENTATION

5 minutes

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#### Purposes

- To welcome participants
- To remind participants about the purpose and spirit of the dialogue
- To say something about roles, schedule, etc., so people know what to expect

### Welcome and restatement of purpose

*Introduce yourself (and your co-facilitator) and say something like:*

“Welcome. I’m glad that you decided to participate in this dialogue. In a minute I’ll explain the agenda, but first I want to talk a little about the purpose of this session.

“It’s likely that each of us has been affected differently by the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and that we each have different feelings, convictions, questions, and dilemmas. I hope that in this dialogue you will feel welcome to speak openly about your experiences and perspectives, and able to listen to the other people in the group with resilience even when you hear something that upsets you. When people are able to do that, they usually leave with richer and wider perspectives, or at least they understand each other better. They often come to understand themselves better as well.

“We define dialogue as a conversation in which the participants seek to understand each other better, and to understand their own perspectives better, but not to convince each other or to reach agreement. It is easy to fall into patterns of debating, lecturing, or avoiding the most difficult topics when we talk about issues like this one, and so we have set up a structure to help you to have that kind of conversation. The pace will be slower than the pace of an ordinary conversation. We will ask you to step back from stating your conclusions and positions to talk in a more personal way—sharing your experiences; explaining the assumptions, feelings, and thought processes that bring you to your conclusions; and talking about your areas of confusion or ambivalence as well as your convictions.

“At times, the structure may feel unnatural, and you may find yourself having to work hard to be part of this kind of conversation, as opposed to a debate or an ordinary discussion. We have found that this kind of structure can help people enormously to have the kind of conversation they want to have, however, and that the effort is worth it.”

### Your role as facilitator

“In my role as facilitator, I will guide you through the dialogue and help you to stick to the agreements you make with each other or renegotiate them if necessary. I’ll also monitor time. If at any point you have concerns about how things are going, or how I’m playing my role, please let me know and we’ll work together to figure out how to address those concerns.

“Does anyone have any questions so far?”



### **Schedule and ending time**

“Let me tell you a little bit about the agenda:

*Refer to an agenda or posted newsprint if you have made them.*

“We’ll begin by having you make some agreements about how you will communicate with each other during the dialogue.

“Then, we’ll go around the circle and you will all have a chance to introduce yourselves and share your hopes for the session. After that we’ll have three go-rounds in which you’ll take turns responding to a question that I’ll pose. We’ll go around in order, and everyone will have the same amount of time to respond. If you don’t want to speak when it’s your turn, you can pass, and we’ll come back to you at the end. You can respond to the question then, or you’re welcome to pass again.

“Following the go-rounds, we’ll have some time for a less structured back-and-forth conversation in which you can ask each other questions, make connections between different experiences and perspectives, pursue themes that came up. I’ll explain more about that when we come to it.

“Finally, we’ll take time at the end for each of you to say some parting words about the dialogue. You’ll also be able to give us written feedback.”

“We’ll aim to end by (time). Can everyone stay until then?”

*If people have to leave early, determine how they will leave (for example, by saying a few parting words or just by getting up to leave quietly) and how you will get their feedback.*

### **Pens and paper**

“There are pens and paper available for note-taking so you can organize your thoughts or jot down something that you want to remember for later. This can make it easier for you to return your full attention to listening.”

### **Logistics**

“A few logistical issues: If you have a cell phone, please turn it off or set it to vibrate. If you want to take a break, let me know. Also, the bathrooms are located....”

**AGREEMENTS****10 minutes****Purpose**

To set up communication agreements that will serve the purposes of the dialogue, and to ensure that everyone understands what they are agreeing to

**Explain the agreements and your role in helping the participants to stick to them:**

“I’d like to propose some communication agreements that have been helpful in other dialogues. Making agreements about how people will communicate with each other is a key part of establishing an environment for dialogue.

“I’ll read the proposed agreements aloud, and then ask if you’d like to adopt them as they are or revise them for our group, or if you have any questions.

“One of my main tasks as the facilitator will be to help you to stick to your agreements. I will let you know if I think you’ve violated one of them, or if I have a question about whether or not one of the agreements has been violated. On occasion, I may interrupt you while you’re speaking in order to remind you about an agreement, but I’ll try to interrupt as little as possible. Dialogue can involve real work, and people often forget about one of the agreements at some point during the conversation. It’s important to take the agreements seriously, so I’ll be here to remind you about them and to help you with them.”

**PROPOSED AGREEMENTS**

Regarding the **spirit** of our speaking and listening

1. We will speak for ourselves and allow others to speak for themselves. We will not expect ourselves or others to represent, defend, or explain an entire group.
2. We will not criticize the views of others or attempt to persuade them. (Optional comment: In other words, please speak about what you know and think and care about, not about what others should know, think, or care about.)
3. We will listen with resilience, “hanging in” when we hear something that is hard to hear.

Regarding the **form** of our speaking and listening

4. We will participate within the time frames suggested by the facilitator and share “airtime.”
5. We will not interrupt except to indicate that we cannot hear a speaker.
6. We will “pass” or “pass for now” if we are not ready or willing to respond to a question.

Regarding **confidentiality**

7. When we discuss our experience here with people outside the group, we will not attach names or any other identifying information to particular comments unless we have permission to do so.

Regarding the **broader community**

8. If we refer by name to other community members who are not present, we will show them the same respect that we intend to show each other.

*Note: You may want to distribute printed copies of the proposed agreements to each of the participants as well, and invite them to read along and to refer to them throughout the dialogue. You can also ask the participants to take turns reading the agreements out loud rather than reading them yourself.*

*See Appendix J-1 for a handout of these agreements. Also, you will find an alternate version of the agreements in Section 7.2 and Appendix J-2.*

**Invite questions and suggestions and ask the participants to show that they agree:**

*After reading the proposed agreements, you can say something like:*

“Are there any questions about what any of these mean? Would you like to suggest any changes or additions?”

*If suggestions are made and agreed to by all, write them on any posted list.*

“So, is each of you prepared to follow these guidelines as best you can, and allow me to remind you if you forget? If you agree to follow the guidelines, please raise your hand. This way everyone can see that everyone else has agreed.”

*Check to make sure everyone has agreed.*

“OK, these will serve as our agreements. If at any point you feel that these agreements are not serving your purposes adequately, speak up and we’ll see if it makes sense to revise them.”

**INTRODUCTIONS AND HOPES****15 minutes****Purpose**

To create a shared sense of participants' hopes for the dialogue, what they bring to it and/or what they hope to experience during it

**Personal introductions**

"Let's start by going around and saying your name and ...

- something you had to leave behind to be here tonight (*for example, a task undone, a baseball game, a child wanting help with a science project*)."

-and/or-

- something about yourself that you'd like other people to know and that doesn't relate to the conflict. It could be about work, play, passions or pre-occupations, anything."

-and/or-

- two things about yourself that you'd like other people to know. One that's serious—maybe about your family or your job—and one that's silly—for example, about your favorite vegetable or TV show."

-and/or-

- something that led you to accept the invitation to join this dialogue."

*The middle two options take more time, up to two minutes per person, but will probably foster greater personal connection among the participants. After inviting people to introduce themselves, you can say, "It's often difficult to answer questions like these briefly because there's so much you could say, so please take a minute to choose just a few things to say. When we go around I'll ask you to speak for no more than two minutes each".*

*The last option is good to include in the introductory go-round if you plan to skip the "hopes" go-round. See below.*

**Hopes**

Next, ask something like:

"Now we'll have one more quick go-round. Let's go around the circle again and say

- something that you hope to experience or learn while you are here."

-and/or-

- something that would make you glad you came."

*Note: You can skip the "hopes" go-round if you have asked people what led them to accept the invitation in the introductory go-round.*

**FIRST QUESTION (a two-part question)**

**20 minutes (Time for each response: 3 minutes)**

**Purpose**

To invite participants to connect their own personal experience with their response to the current situation

**Ask the question**

“Now, I’d like to invite you to take up to three minutes to respond to the following question—actually a set of two questions:

- 1) How have events related to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict affected you personally?**
- 2) Is there something you’d be willing to share about your life experiences that might help others understand your response to the conflict?”**

*(It is helpful to have the questions for this session on a handout, as in Appendix C, or on a flip chart.)*

“First, let’s take a minute so you can collect your thoughts.”

*After pause, repeat the questions.*

“I’ll ask for someone to start, and then we’ll go around. If we come to you before you are ready, you can pass and I’ll check in with you later to see if you’d like to speak or if you’d like pass again.”

*Optional:* “Remember, you may want to jot down key phrases, themes, or connections to explore later.”

*Optional:* “Let’s take a brief moment after each person speaks so that everyone can absorb what they’ve said.”

“Would anyone like to start?”

*Tip: If people seem to be asserting positions rather than sharing their personal experience, gently remind them about the question. If someone seems to have an especially hard time speaking personally, it may help to explain the purpose of the question, so that the participants understand why you want them to speak personally. If people seem to be forgetting about the second part of the question, remind them, “Is there anything you’d like to add about life experiences that may have influenced your responses?”*

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**SECOND QUESTION**

**10 minutes** (Time for each response: 1-2 minutes)

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**Purpose**

To encourage participants to speak about their heartfelt concerns, values, and hopes

**Ask the question**

“Again, I’ll pose a question and, this time, ask you to just take a minute or two to respond. I’ll signal you at two minutes.”

**What’s the heart of the matter for you?**

“First, take a minute to collect your thoughts.”

*After a pause, repeat the question.*

“I’ll ask someone to start, and then we’ll go around. If your turn comes before you are ready, you can pass and I’ll check in with you later to see if you’d like to speak.

“Is anyone ready to start?”

*Tip: If people are focusing more on the specifics of their views and less on what’s at the core or “heart of the matter” you can ask, “In what you’ve said, what do you think is at the heart of the matter for you?” or “What core values, fears, or hopes shape the way you look at the issues?”*

**THIRD QUESTION****20 minutes (Time for each response: 3 minutes)****Purposes**

To encourage participants to:

- reflect on aspects of their own views—thoughts, feelings, questions, and dilemmas—that they may not express as readily as others
- reveal fresh information about complex thinking; this often enables people to see connections across differences and to present their thinking, values, and beliefs in a manner that counters stereotypes

**Ask the question**

“Again, I’d like to pose a question. This is a complicated question, so I’ll give you plenty of time to think. You’ll each have up to three minutes to respond.”

**What have you been finding difficult to sort out in your own mind? What are some of the mixed feelings, value conflicts, or areas of confusion or uncertainty about the conflict that stand out most for you right now?**

*Alternative wording (from the format in Section 7.2):*

“Within your thinking about the conflict, do you have some areas of uncertainty or value conflicts that you’re willing to speak about? For example, can you think of a time when the values you hold dear related to this issue bumped up against other values that are also important to you—or a time when you felt yourself pulled in two directions?”

“That’s a lot to take in, so I’ll repeat the question. Let me know if you don’t understand it.”

*Repeat the question slowly.*

“Let’s take a minute to reflect on this before anyone speaks.”

*After a pause, repeat the questions.*

“We’ll start with whoever is ready, and then we’ll go around. If your turn comes before you are ready, you can pass and I’ll check in with you later to see if you’d like to speak.”

*Tip: If participants have already spoken about their uncertainties and value conflicts, you can invite them to use this time to say more about their views, worries, or hopes instead: “I realize that some of you have already spoken quite a bit about your uncertainties and internal conflicts. You can use this time to talk more about them. If you’d prefer, you can also say more about your views and experience instead, in a way that fills out the complexities of your viewpoints.”*

**FACILITATED DISCUSSION****25 minutes****Purpose**

To allow participants to have a more interactive conversation that makes connections among their own and other people's thoughts and feelings

**Tone-setting comments**

“We are now at the point in our time together when you can talk more freely. As we move into this less structured time, it's important to remember why we are here: not to debate or persuade but to speak with sincerity, to listen with open-heartedness and resilience, to reflect on our own views, and to seek understanding of other views. Optional: When you'd like to speak, please let me know by raising your hand.”

*Read the following “pathways to connected conversation,” and remind the participants that they are printed on a handout or posted for everyone to see (a handout version is available in Appendix H).*

-or-

*Summarize the pathways more simply:*

“This is a time to make connections between what is on your mind and something others have said. You can identify and pursue a theme, explore similarities and differences, ask questions, or comment on how what you've heard has been enriching or, perhaps, unsettling.”

*In either case, begin by asking the participants if they have any questions that they'd like to ask another participant.*

**PATHWAYS TO A CONNECTED CONVERSATION**

- **Note a point of learning**

Have you heard something that stirred fresh thoughts or feelings?

- **Pick up and weave a thread**

Has an interesting theme or idea emerged that you'd like to add to?

- **Clarify differences**

Have you heard something you disagreed with? If so, first check to see if you understood it correctly. Then say what was unsettling to you about what you heard and why.

- **Ask a question**

Is there something someone said that you'd like to understand better? If you ask a question, be sure it reflects genuine curiosity and is not a challenge in disguise.

“Let's take a minute to think, and then start by hearing the questions you'd like to ask one another.”

*Pause*

“Is there anyone who would like to ask a question?”

*After questions, open up the other “pathways” to connected conversations.*



**PARTING WORDS****15 minutes****Purposes**

- To encourage reflection about what participants learned or valued
- To invite participants to say something that will bring their participation to a meaningful close

**Ask for parting thoughts**

“Our time here is coming to an end. Are there any parting words that you’d like to say to bring your participation to a close?”

“You may want to simply comment on what the experience has been like for you. Or you may want to say . . . ”

*(Facilitator chooses one or two of the following)*

- one idea, feeling, commitment, or question that you are taking with you from this experience

*-or-*

- one thing you want to remember about this conversation

*-or-*

- something that came up for you that you may want to share with a friend, family member, or co-worker, or carry with you into your life in some other way

*Tip: If the participants have trouble speaking briefly, you may want to time them during this segment of the dialogue to ensure that everyone gets a chance to speak and that the session ends promptly.*

*After hearing from all who wish to speak:*

- *Thank the participants.*
- *Ask for feedback. Indicate that you and the staff at PCP and JDG would like to learn from their feedback. A participant feedback form can be found in Appendix E, as well as a facilitator feedback form.*

## 7.2 A Sample Opening Session in a Series

This format is very similar to the single-session dialogue format in Section 7.1, but it allows more time for people to introduce themselves and tell their personal stories, and it includes the option of postponing the questions about the “heart of the matter” and ambivalence and uncertainty to later sessions. The more divided the group is, the more important it is not to rush through the first session but rather to build a strong foundation of personal connection.

You will need to decide how many go-rounds to conduct and which questions to pose in this first session. You should consider:

- How well do people know each other? If not well, they may benefit from longer introductions and more time for personal stories.
- How divided is the group? The more divided they are, the more important it is not to rush.
- How much time do you have for the dialogue? If the participants can stay for three hours, there will usually be enough time for the second and third go-rounds, even when participants give lengthy responses in the first.

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### WELCOME AND ORIENTATION

5 minutes

#### Purposes

- To welcome participants into this conversation and the series
- To remind participants about the purpose and spirit of the dialogue and any other relevant information from the invitation
- To say something about roles, schedule, etc., so people know what to expect

### Welcome and restatement of purpose

Say something like

“Welcome ...”

Refer, if relevant, to, pre-meeting conversation. For example, “I enjoyed talking with you all by phone, and it’s great to finally meet you in person.”

“As you know from the invitation...”

Restate key points about the purpose of the dialogue. Also restate any expectations for the participants—for example, “Everyone has committed at this point to participating in three sessions. During the last session, we can talk about whether or not to continue.” Save scheduling details for the end. For a sample invitation, see Appendix G. For a sample introduction to dialogue, see Section 7.1.

“I hope this will be a time when you’ll feel fully welcome to speak about your experiences and your views and when you can commit to listening to each other with resilience even when what you hear upsets you. When people are able to do that, they usually leave with richer and wider perspectives, or at least they understand each other better. They often come to understand themselves better as well.”

### **Your role as facilitator**

“In my role as facilitator, I will guide you through the dialogue and help you to stick to the agreements you make with each other or renegotiate them if necessary. I’ll also monitor time. If at any point you have concerns about how things are going, or how I’m playing my role, please let me know and we’ll work together to figure out how to address those concerns.”

“Does anyone have any questions so far?”

### **Schedule and ending time**

“Let me tell you a little bit about the flow of the dialogue today.”

*Refer to a handout or posted newsprint if you have made them.*

“The agenda is fairly structured today. After a group builds its foundation in the first meeting or two, it’s often able to move into a less structured kind of conversation. In planning future meetings, I’ll be guided by your feedback.

“Today we’ll begin by making some communication agreements.

“Then, we’ll have a go-round in which you can introduce yourselves to each other and say something about your hopes for the dialogue.

“Next, we’ll have a couple of go-rounds in which you can respond to some questions that I will pose.

“Following the go-rounds, we’ll have some time for less structured conversation in which you can explore connections among your experiences and perspectives. Those connections might take the form of one person asking another person a question. Or they might take the form of simply noting similarities and differences and exploring them a bit further.

“Finally, we’ll take time at the end for each of you to say some parting words about your experience tonight and to say something about your wishes for future meetings. You’ll also be able to give written feedback. Then we’ll (make or confirm) the dates of our future meetings.

“We’ll aim to end by (time). Can everyone stay until then?”

*If people have to leave early, determine how they will leave (e.g., by saying a few parting words or by just getting up to leave quietly) and how you will get their feedback.*

“At future meetings if you know you need to leave early, please let us know at the outset so no one will wonder if your departure was due to something they said.”

### **Pens and paper**

“There are pens and paper available for note-taking so you can organize your thoughts or jot down something that you want to remember for later. This can make it easier for you to return your full attention to listening.”

### **Logistics**

“A few logistical issues: If you have a cell phone, please turn it off or set it to vibrate. If you want to take a break, let me know. Also, the bathrooms are located...”

**AGREEMENTS****10 minutes****Purpose**

To craft a set of communication agreements that everyone understands and agrees to that will serve the purposes of the dialogue.

**Introduce Agreements**

“Now let’s make some communication agreements. Your handout (or a posted sheet) lists some guidelines that others have used to create an environment where people can speak openly and listen fully. Please take a moment to read them, or I’ll read them aloud, and then I’ll check in with you to see if you’d like to adopt them as they are or revise them for our group.”

**PROPOSED AGREEMENTS**

1. **We will speak for ourselves.** We won’t try to represent a whole group, and we will not ask others to represent, defend, or explain an entire group.
2. **We will avoid making grand pronouncements** and, instead, connect what we know and believe to our experiences, influences in our lives, particular sources of information, etc.
3. **We will refrain from characterizing the views of others in a critical spirit**, keeping in mind that we’re here to understand each other, not to persuade each other.
4. **We will listen with resilience**, “hanging in” when we hear something that is hard to hear.
5. **We will share “airtime” and refrain from interrupting others.**
6. **We will “pass” or “pass for now”** if we are not ready or willing to respond to a question—no explanation required.
7. **If asked to keep something confidential, we will honor the request.** In conversations outside of the group we won’t attribute particular statements to particular individuals by name or identifying information without permission.
8. **We’ll avoid making negative attributions** about the beliefs, values, and motives of other participants, for example, “You only say that because…” When tempted to do so, we’ll consider the possibility of testing the assumption we’re making by asking a question, for example, “Why is that important to you?”
9. **We’ll use e-mail only for scheduling**, not for substantive discussion.

*If you read them aloud, you can add a few words of explanation or clarification.*

*A handout version of these agreements appears in Appendix J-2. Another set of agreements appears in Appendix J-1, to which you could simply add #9 above.*

*After reading the guidelines, you can say something like:*

“Are there any questions about what any of these proposed agreements mean? Would you like to suggest any revisions or additions?”

*If suggestions are made and agreed to by all, write them on any posted list.*

“So, is each of you prepared to follow these guidelines as best you can, and allow me to remind you if you forget? If you agree to follow the guidelines, please raise your hand. This way everyone can see that everyone else has agreed.”

*Check to make sure everyone has agreed.*

“OK, these will serve as our agreements. If at any point you feel that these agreements are not serving your purposes adequately, speak up and we’ll see if it makes sense to revise them.”

“If at any point you feel that these agreements are not serving our purposes adequately, speak up and we’ll see if it makes sense to revise them. And if you need a time-out to address a concern about how things are going, just give me a “time-out” signal.”

**INTRODUCTIONS AND HOPES****15 minutes****Purpose**

To create a shared sense of participants' hopes for the dialogue, what they bring to it and/or what they hope to experience during it

**Personal introductions**

“Let’s start by going around and saying your name and ...

- something you had to leave behind to be here tonight (for example, a task undone, a baseball game, a child wanting help with a science project).”

-and/or-

- something about yourself that you’d like other people to know and that doesn’t relate to the conflict. It could be about work, play, passions or pre-occupations, anything.”

-and/or-

- two things about yourself that you’d like other people to know. One that’s serious—maybe about your family or your job—and one that’s silly—for example, about your favorite vegetable or TV show.”

-and/or-

- something that led you to accept the invitation to join this dialogue.”

*The middle two options take more time, up to two minutes per person, but will probably foster greater personal connection among the participants. After inviting people to introduce themselves, you can say, “It’s often difficult to answer questions like these briefly because there’s so much you could say, so please take a minute to choose just a few things to say. When we go around I’ll ask you to speak for no more than two minutes each.*

*The last option is best if you plan not to conduct a separate go-round about the participants’ hopes. See below.*

**Hopes**

Next, ask something like:

“Now we’ll have one more quick go-round. Let’s go around the circle again and say

- something that you hope to experience or learn while you are here.”

-and/or-

- something that would make you glad you came.”

*Note: You can skip the “hopes” go-round if you have asked people what led them to accept the invitation in the introductory go-round.*

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**FIRST QUESTION (a two-part question)**

**20 minutes (Time for each response: 3 or 4 minutes)**

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**Purpose**

To invite participants to connect their response to the conflict with their own personal experience

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**Ask the Question**

“Now, I’d like to invite you to take three (or four) minutes to respond to the following question—actually a set of two questions:

- 1) How have events related to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict affected you personally?**
- 2) Is there something you’d be willing to share about your life experiences that may relate to how you’ve responded to the conflict?**

First, let’s take a minute so you can collect your thoughts.”

*After a pause, repeat the questions.*

“Any one of you can start when you are ready (Or ask someone if she would like to start.) Then we’ll go around. If we come to you before you are ready, you can pass and I’ll check in with you later to see if you’d like to speak.”

*Optional:* “Remember, you may want to jot down key phrases that will help you hold on to questions you might want to ask later, or topics you’d like to explore.”

**SUBSEQUENT QUESTIONS (if any)****0-40 minutes (Time for each response: 2-3 minutes)****Purposes**

To encourage participants to

- share their heartfelt concerns, values, and hopes
- share uncertainties and value conflicts

**Facilitator Options**

Depending on time and desired pace:

- 1) *Skip this section and move directly to the facilitated discussion. In this case, you will save these questions for the next session. This is recommended if you have less than one hour left in a group of six or more, or if you feel that the group you're working with is ready for a less structured exchange.*
- 2) *Conduct a separate go-round for each question. This generally works best, if time permits.*
- 3) *Pose both questions together in a single go-round. Take care to ensure that people don't forget to address the second question. This option may be best if you have enough time for one but not two go-round, and you think more structure is desirable for the group. If you have only one hour left and you choose this option, there may be very little time left for the "connected conversation."*
- 4) *Pose only the first question and defer the second until the next meeting. This is the least desirable option, as these two questions complement each other in important ways.*

**Ask the Question**

Start by saying:

"Again, I'll pose a question (or set of questions), we'll pause so you can collect your thoughts and jot down notes, and then we'll go around and hear from everyone who wishes to speak. You'll have up to three minutes to speak."

Then read the question(s):

- 1) **As you think about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, what's at the heart of the matter for you?**
- 2) **Within your thinking about the conflict, do you have some areas of uncertainty or value conflicts that you're willing to speak about? For example, can you think of a time when the values you hold dear related to this issue bumped up against other values that are also important to you—or a time when you felt yourself pulled in two directions?**

*Alternate wording for the second question:* What have you been finding difficult to sort out in your own mind? What are some of the mixed feelings, value conflicts, and/or areas of confusion or uncertainty about the conflict that stand out most for you right now?



*Then say:*

“That’s a lot to take in, so I’ll repeat the question(s).”

*Pause, and then repeat the questions again before the go-round.*

“We’ll start with whoever is ready, and then we’ll go around (or choose someone to start). If your turn comes before you are ready, you can pass and I’ll check in with you later to see if you’d like to speak.”

*Alternate wording:* “Instead of going around this time we’ll hear from people in whatever order they feel ready to speak.”

**FACILITATED DISCUSSION****25 minutes****Purpose**

To allow participants to have a more interactive discussion that makes connections among others' thoughts and feelings and their own

**Tone-setting comments**

"We are now at the point in our time together when you can talk in a less structured way. As we move into this part of the dialogue, it's important to remember your purposes here: not to debate or persuade but to speak with care, to listen with open heartedness and resilience, to reflect on your own views, and to seek understanding of others' views." Optional: "When you'd like to speak, please let me know by raising your hand."

*Facilitator Options*1) *Invite question asking before introducing the other "pathways."*

"Is there something someone said that you'd like to understand better? If you ask a question, be sure it reflects genuine curiosity and is not a challenge in disguise."

*Once everyone has had a chance to ask a question, you can move on to introducing the three other pathways.*

2) *Introduce all four pathways, but begin by inviting participants to ask questions of one another:*

"This is a time to make connections between what is on your mind and something others have said. You can identify and pursue a theme, explore similarities and differences, ask a question, or comment on how what you've heard has been enriching or, perhaps, unsettling. Let's start with any questions you have for each other."

*You can verbally draw from the material below or use a handout or flipchart (see Appendix K).*

**PATHWAYS TO A CONNECTED CONVERSATION**• **Ask a question**

Is there something someone said that you'd like to understand better? If you ask a question, be sure it reflects genuine curiosity and is not a challenge in disguise.

• **Note a point of learning**

Have you heard something that stirred fresh thoughts or feelings?

• **Pick up and weave a thread**

Has an interesting theme or idea emerged that you'd like to add to?

• **Clarify differences**

Have you heard something you disagreed with? If so, first check to see if you understood it correctly. Then say what was unsettling to you about what you heard and why.

**PARTING WORDS****15 minutes****Purposes**

- To encourage reflection on what participants learned or valued
- To invite participants to say something that will bring their participation to a meaningful close
- To learn what participants would like to explore in a future meeting

**Ask for parting thoughts**

*Say something like:*

“Our time here is coming to an end. I’d like to pose two questions; then, after you’ve had a minute to reflect, we’ll go around and hear from anyone who wishes to speak.”

*Pose these two questions, either together in a single go-round or in two separate go-rounds:*

- 1) Is there something about your experience here—an idea, a feeling, or a question—that you want to take with you and remember or think about some more?**
- 2) Is there a question or topic that you’d like to be sure to explore in a future meeting?**

*After hearing from all who wish to speak:*

- Get clarity about ideas for the future. Make sure you understand what has been requested and find out if there are any other comments about this dialogue or future meetings.
- Address scheduling issues, if relevant.
- Thank the participants.
- Ask for feedback. (See Appendix E.)

## 7.3 A Sample Format for Later Sessions in a Series (Generic)

The generic format outlined here is a template that you can use to plan subsequent sessions. What will vary is the focal topic and how it is approached. No time-frames are indicated here because the time required for check-in will vary greatly according to what is happening in participants' lives and how inclined they are to share. If you have two hours for the session, you'll want to get to the focal topic after twenty-five to forty minutes and leave twenty to thirty minutes for parting words and discussion of next steps. That will leave fifty to seventy minutes for the focal topic. If you are planning to use a stimulus of significant length (a one-hour video, for example) you will need two-and-half to three hours for the whole session.

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### 7.3.1 Welcome and check-in

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- Welcome people back and make note of any absences or newcomers.
- *Optional*: Make brief comments about the plan for the evening (or wait to do this after check-in).
- Invite people to check in.

Say something like:

“As a way of moving from our daily lives back into this group, let's take a few minutes to check in.

“You can talk about something that's on your mind and that you want to put aside so that you can focus on the dialogue. Or maybe there's something going on in your life that you'd like to share so that people can know you better. Let's try to hear from everyone in about ten minutes, so just a minute or two each would be good. Would anyone like to start?”

*Process: Go around the circle in order, or invite people to speak as they are ready, “popcorn” style. Remind people that they can always pass.*

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### 7.3.2 Orientation to the plan for the meeting, and reminders as needed

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- Describe the plan for this session and explain how it emerged from the participants' input. Check to see if the plan makes sense to the participants. If other ideas emerge for the dialogue, note them for another session or, if there's a consensus to revise the plan for this session, do so.
- If you think the group needs a reminder about their agreements, this is a good time to do that.

*Sample:* “Toward the end of the last meeting, the conversation became quite fast-paced and I'm afraid I was a little lax about stopping people from interrupting one another. I would ask that you try to remember the agreement about not interrupting, even when the energy is high and you're eager to say something. And I'll try to be better about reminding people not to interrupt. It will help if, when you want to speak, you raise your hand and catch my eye, then I'll keep track of who wants to speak and call on you in order. If you're concerned about the process or spirit of the dialogue and you want me to know that right away, give me the “time-out” signal. How does that sound?”

### **7.3.3 Questions posed by the facilitator (see Section 7.5 for some ideas)**

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*You may want to conduct only one go-round, or two or three, depending on the situation.*

- 1) Pose a question (perhaps preceded by a stimulus like a video or reading).
- 2) Indicate the time frame for responses.
- 3) Pause for reflection.
- 4) Re-read the question.
- 5) Go around or invite “popcorn”-style speaking, i.e., the first person who is ready starts.
- 6) Repeat with additional questions if there are any.

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### **7.3.4 Facilitated discussion**

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#### **Reminders about spirit and/or procedures (as appropriate)**

*Examples:*

“As we move into this less structured time, it’s important to remember why we are here: not to debate or persuade but to speak with care, to listen with open-heartedness and resilience, to reflect on our own views, and to seek understanding of other views.”

“When you’d like to speak, please let me know by raising your hand.”

#### **Process**

“Let’s start by seeing if anyone would like to ask a question. Is there something someone said that you’d like to understand better?”

*Optional:* “Before we start, I want to find out how many people have questions. Can I get a show of hands? If you have a question you’d like to ask, please raise your hand. This way I can make sure everyone has a chance to ask at least one question before anyone goes on to ask a second.”

*Take questions. If the participants begin an extended discussion of a particular question, and you haven’t learned how many people still want to ask questions of their own, intervene at some point to find out:*

“Before we go on, I’d like to check to find out how many other people have questions they want to ask.”

*Make sure that those questions can get asked and answered before time runs out, or help the group decide whether to save some for next time. If there are no more questions, continue by asking:*

“Do any of you want to comment on what you’ve heard and connect it to something that’s on your mind or pursue a particular theme or question?”

*Optional:* Continue to use the “Connected Conversation” handout that you used in the first session. See Appendix K.

### 7.3.5 Parting Words and Next Steps

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“Our time together is coming to an end. I’d like to pose two questions, and then after you’ve had a minute to reflect, we’ll go around and hear from anyone who wishes to speak.

- **Is there something about your experience here—an idea, a feeling, or a question—that you want to take with you and remember, or think about some more?**

*-and-*

- **Is there a question or topic that you’d like to be sure to explore in a future meeting?**

*After hearing from all who wish to speak, make sure you understand what has been requested and see if there are any other comments about this dialogue or future meetings.*

**If this is the last meeting in a series, see Section 4.3.5 for ideas about closing a final session.**

- Thank the participants.
- Invite or arrange for feedback. There are many ways to do this, such as through written feedback forms (see Appendix E), through eliciting comments on the spot about how the meeting went, by arranging to call the participants by phone, or by encouraging participants to call or e-mail with comments.

## 7.4 A Sample Exercise for a Later Session in a Series: PCP's Exercise on Stereotyping

You can use this exercise in the second session of a series, if it seems appropriate based on what occurred in the first session. You can also keep it as an option for a later session.

The stereotyping exercise can work particularly well as a follow-up to the introductory session described in 7.2. These two sessions together give participants a way to learn about each other's stories, passions, uncertainties, and sensitivities. They also enable participants to practice speaking about their uncertainties as well as their certainties and to practice asking questions that represent a genuine interest in another person's perspective.

The question-asking portion of the stereotyping exercise can also help you as the facilitator to learn about the issues that participants would like to explore in more depth with each other. This information, along with participants' explicit requests for future sessions, should put you in a good position to plan a third session that is responsive to participants' interests.

When you use this exercise in a dialogue session, the flow of the meeting will be roughly as follows:

### 1) WELCOME, ORIENTATION, AND CHECK-IN (25 minutes)

- a) Brief remarks about the plan for the evening and ending time
- b) Reminders about the agreements as appropriate
- c) Check-in

### 2) THE STEREOTYPING EXERCISE (1 hour, 15 minutes)

#### a) Introduction

*Hand out the worksheet and introduce the exercise. You can read aloud some or all of the instructions printed on the worksheet. Make sure that everyone understands how to fill out the sheet. In addition, be sure to let participants know that after filling out their worksheet, they will share with the group only what they want to share; no one else will see their worksheet.*

*Ask if anyone has questions. You may need to give some examples of stereotypes they could mention:*

- As an American Jew, I feel viewed by some of my Israeli friends or family as —
- As a member of organization X, I feel viewed by (some other Jews) as having — values.
- As a member of the synagogue's X committee, I feel viewed by some other members as supporting —
- As a Jew who believes X, I feel viewed by many of my Jewish family members as —

#### b) Silent time with the worksheets

*Ask people to fill out the worksheet silently. Usually it takes about five minutes.*

**c) Go-round(s)**

“Let’s go around and hear what you wrote on your list and how you marked them. When you speak about the stereotype that you marked as most painful, please say something about what makes it especially painful to have that stereotype attributed to you. Please say as much as you feel comfortable saying.”

-or-

“Let’s go around and hear about the stereotype you marked as most painful. Please explain what you know yourself that makes it especially painful to have that stereotype attributed to you. After that, we’ll have a second go-round and hear about the some of the other stereotypes on your lists. Please say as much as you feel comfortable saying.”

Add:

“After each person speaks, we’ll have a pause, so you can write down any questions you’d like to ask that person later—questions that represent your curiosity to better understand something they said.”

-or-

“After we go around, you’ll have a chance to ask each other questions that will help you better understand what each other said, and so this is an especially good time to jot down notes that will help you remember questions that come up as you’re listening. I’ll make sure you have some quiet time at the end to formulate your questions.”

**d) Question asking:**

*Invite people to ask questions of one another. If you decide on two go-rounds, they can pose their own questions after each go-round or after both have been completed. You probably won’t be able to get to all of their questions. As you call on people, pay attention to balance. Avoid having all the questions go in one direction or another, in terms of political perspectives. Until all questions have been asked, discourage more open discussion of the topics raised. If people want to discuss a topic in more depth during this segment of the dialogue, in most cases you should ask them to hold on to those topics for later in the meeting or for the next meeting.*

**3) FACILITATED DISCUSSION (if there’s time)**

It is unlikely that you will run out of questions before the end of the session. If you do, you can ask if there are any questions that they wish someone had asked them and give them an opportunity to answer their own question. Alternatively, you can simply ask if anyone would like to say more about what they wrote on their lists or what they heard from others.

**4) CLOSING (20 minutes)**

**a) Parting words about this session and hopes for future sessions**

**b) Logistics/Scheduling**

**c) Opportunity for written feedback (as appropriate)**



## Worksheet for PCP's Exercise on Stereotyping\*

### INTRODUCTION

This exercise gives you an opportunity to speak about the ways in which you have felt stereotyped by people—in particular other Jews—who have a different point of view about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. You will have some quiet time to use this worksheet, and then you will have a go-round in which you will share only what you want to share. When sharing and discussing the exercise in the full group you will not be asked to comment on whether you do or do not hold the stereotypes that others spoke about. The purposes of this exercise are (1) to enhance understanding of the concerns and fears you all have about the ways you may be viewed by others and (2) to become better known for who you are, in contrast to how you may fear you are viewed.

### INDIVIDUAL REFLECTION AND LIST GENERATION

Please reflect for a moment on situations in which you have felt that other Jews held stereotypes about you that relate directly or indirectly to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict or your views about it. Please make a list of four or five such stereotypes, not worrying for the moment about how much truth (if any) there is in those stereotypes. (If this is confusing, ask your facilitator for examples.)

As a \_\_\_\_\_ I think that I am viewed by \_\_\_\_\_  
as having these characteristics, beliefs, or intentions: \_\_\_\_\_

As a \_\_\_\_\_ I think that I am viewed by \_\_\_\_\_  
as having these characteristics, beliefs, or intentions: \_\_\_\_\_

As a \_\_\_\_\_ I think that I am viewed by \_\_\_\_\_  
as having these characteristics, beliefs, or intentions: \_\_\_\_\_

As a \_\_\_\_\_ I think that I am viewed by \_\_\_\_\_  
as having these characteristics, beliefs, or intentions: \_\_\_\_\_

As a \_\_\_\_\_ I think that I am viewed by \_\_\_\_\_  
as having these characteristics, beliefs, or intentions: \_\_\_\_\_

\* This exercise was developed by Richard Chasin, MD, one of the founders of the Public Conversations Project, for use at the 1986 Congress of the International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War. For more information, see [www.publicconversations.org](http://www.publicconversations.org) and download the article "Creating Systemic Interventions for the Sociopolitical Arena" by R. Chasin and M. Herzig.

**PLEASE MARK YOUR LIST AS FOLLOWS:**

- 1) Which *one* stereotype would you find to be most painful or offensive if someone applied it to you? (Mark with a “P”)
- 2) Which *one or two* stereotypes are the most inaccurate as applied to you? (Mark with an “I”)
- 3) Which stereotype on your list, if any, do you think is understandably applied to you, even if it is not really accurate? (Mark with a “U”)

**PLEASE BE PREPARED TO RESPOND TO THESE QUESTIONS IN THE FULL GROUP**

**Painful Stereotypes:** Please say something, if you wish to, about the one stereotype that you would find most offensive or painful if applied to you, then please say how you know yourself that makes this stereotype so painful.

**Inaccurate Stereotypes:** Are there stereotypes on your list that you marked as particularly inaccurate that you’d like to speak about, again, indicating how you know yourself to be different from what these stereotypes would suggest about you? If so, please share something about the stereotype and how you understand it to be inaccurate as applied to you.

**Understandable Stereotypes:** Many stereotypes have some degree of truth—even if very small—for some people and groups to which they are applied. It can be helpful for people with different perspectives to “own” some aspects of their views or communication styles or activism about which they are less than proud. It can also be helpful for people to own aspects that they feel comfortable with, but which they can understand being seen in a somewhat negative light, given the way their general perspectives are often communicated in debates, in the media, etc.. Were there any like that on your list? If so, please share that if you are willing.

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NOTE: As you listen to others’ responses, please make note of questions you’d like to ask—not rhetorical questions, but questions that will help you better understand what others have said.

**QUESTIONS I’D LIKE TO ASK OTHERS ABOUT THEIR RESPONSES:**

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## 7.5 Question Sets

### 7.5.1 About These Question Sets

#### Orientation to the Question Sets

The following is a list of suggested opening questions for use in a multi-session dialogue series. (See Section 7.3.3 for a sample format.) These questions are offered only as ideas. You may or may not find questions here that are relevant to the participants' interests. You can use these questions exactly as they're printed, modify them to meet your group's needs, or just use them as a jumping-off point to design questions of your own. For guidance in designing questions, see Section 4.3.4.

The questions are divided into several categories to make it easier for you to find what you need. Many of the questions could fit into multiple categories, however, and so you may want to skim through the whole list.

Some of these questions have been used extensively in dialogue sessions, or at least piloted, and some have not been tested yet. Please send us your feedback about how they work in your dialogues.

#### Tips On Using the Question Sets

- *Use your judgment about whether to ask multiple questions as a stimulus for one opening go-round, or to ask the questions in two or three go-rounds.*

In the question sets that follow, we have broken up the questions into two or three go-rounds. A group that has developed respectful ways of communicating and wants less structure, however, will in most cases be well served by a single opening go-round.

- *Give people plenty of time to think.*

Many of these questions are quite complex, even those that are designed for a single go-round. Make sure to give participants plenty of time to think and jot down notes.

- *Consider giving the participants the questions in writing.*

When you use particularly complex questions, it can be very helpful to give the participants a copy of the questions in writing so that they don't have to keep them all in their heads.

- *Keep in mind the "popcorn" option.*

Although we list the questions as "go-round" questions, you need not go around the circle in order. You can instead ask people to speak as they are ready. (See Section 4.1.5.)

- *Considering posing follow-up questions that invite reflection.*

You can follow any opening question or set of questions by asking the participants to share something about how they experienced the answers they heard or what they are taking with them from the experience. For example: "What did you notice? What surprised you? Did you hear anything that expanded your thinking or gave you food for thought?"

There are many ways to use questions of this sort. For example, you can pose them for a final go-round in the early, structured part of the conversation. You can use them to open the less-structured part of the conversation—this is, you can pose the questions a stimulus to

## CONSTRUCTIVE CONVERSATIONS ABOUT THE ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN CONFLICT

conversation that will not be as structured as a go-round. You can use them as part of the closing segment of the dialogue, which typically invites people to reflect on what they have experienced. You can add questions of this sort to the agenda when you plan the session, or you can pose them spontaneously.

- *Choose questions that are appropriate to the group's development.*

Some groups will need to move slowly from questions that help them to know each other's perspectives and how those perspectives have been shaped by their experiences to questions that are more analytical and/or more likely to be painfully contentious.

## 7.5.2 Question Sets

### The Values and Qualities That Bring Us Here

#### 1. The Values and Qualities That Bring Us Here

##### *First Go-Round*

Who in your life, past or present, would not be surprised and would be pleased to see you here in this dialogue group? If they witnessed you here, what would they appreciate about you?

##### *Second Go-Round*

Is what he/she would appreciate something that you also appreciate in yourself? How do you think you developed that quality? How does it show up in your life? What makes it harder or easier for you to be that way?

*Note: This question encourages the participants to speak about some personal traits and values that attracted them to dialogue. A simpler question like, "What brought you here?" also invites people to talk about what brought them to the dialogue, but it has a different purpose and impact. It usually draws more on what people hope to experience or avoid, and not so much on who they are. It may also remind people of the values and qualities that they would like to hold on to when the conversation is difficult.*

## **Our Relationships with Other Jews and with Israel**

### **2. Connections with Other Jews: Belonging and Alienation**

#### *First Go-Round*

When you have felt a sense of belonging with other Jews, what contributed to that feeling?

When you have felt alienated or isolated from other Jews, what contributed to that feeling?

#### *Second Go-Round*

How has the Israeli-Palestinian conflict affected your feelings of belonging and alienation?

#### *Notes:*

- *These questions ask participants to talk in a general way about their experiences with other Jews, but you can choose to focus more narrowly on their experiences with specific groups. For example, you can ask them to talk about the feelings they experience in their synagogue or school.*
- *In conversations that focus on participants' synagogue, school, or organization, ask the participants not to refer by name to community members who are absent from the room when they share negative experiences.*

### **3. The Development of Our Relationship with Israel**

#### *First Go-Round*

How would you describe your relationship with Israel now?

How has your relationship with Israel changed over time?

How have your hopes, fears, and views about Israel and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict changed over time?

#### *Second Go-Round*

What do you hope your relationship with Israel will be like in the future?

### **4. The “Jewish Community”**

What does this phrase mean to you?

If you use this phrase, how do you want it to be understood?

In what ways have you heard it used that bother you? Why?

*Note: You can pose this entire set of questions in a single go-round, or else divide it into two or more go-rounds.*

## Hopes, Visions, and Ideas about the Future

### 5. Hope and Discouragement

#### *First Go-Round*

When you think about the conflict, which people, ideas, or events make you feel more hopeful about the future? What specific hopes do they stir in you?

#### *Second Go-Round*

What discourages you?

### 6. Envisioning a Peaceful Future

#### *First Go-Round*

Imagine that you have opened the newspaper at some future date, maybe five years from now, and you read an article announcing that a comprehensive peace agreement has been made between Israeli and Palestinian leadership. The agreement is widely seen as likely to be sustainable. It's also an agreement that is "good enough," in your eyes, if not perfect.

What was agreed to?

What was gained?

What was given up?

#### *Second Go-Round*

What happened between now and that time in the future to make the agreement possible?

#### *Third Go-Round*

What role did Jews in the U.S. play in making this possible?

#### *Notes:*

- *We suggest that you create a worksheet with these questions and allow people at least five minutes to gather their thoughts and make notes.*
- *If the group includes people with very different amounts of background knowledge, you may want to remind people: "Please say as much or as little about this as you feel comfortable saying, and feel free to pass," or "We want for you to feel comfortable speaking tentatively, talking about ideas you don't feel sure about. It's OK to think out loud."*

## **7. What Kind of Future Do You Think Is Possible?**

### *First Go-Round*

Look ahead five or ten years into the future, and imagine a good outcome for Israel and the Palestinians.

What is the best future that you think is possible? What does it look like? What is happening? Please be as specific as possible.

### *Second Go-Round*

What happened between now and that time in the future to make this future possible?

### *Third Go-Round*

What role did Jews in the U.S. play in bringing about this future?

*Note: Unlike the previous question, this question does not focus on the details of a future peace agreement, but asks the participant to imagine in a more expansive and vivid way what a positive future would look like.*

## **8. Ideals and Practicalities**

### *First Go-Round*

When thinking about the future, many people imagine both an ideal scenario and another scenario that seems more feasible—one that is not ideal but would be good enough, and could be achieved in the foreseeable future.

Do you have different ideas about what an ideal future would look like and what is practical?

What do these two scenarios look like to you?

### *Possible Second Go-Round*

What experiences and influences do you think led you to these visions of the future?



## **Exploring the Feelings, Values, Assumptions, and Experiences That Shape Our Views**

### **9. Values and Worldviews**

#### *First Go-Round*

What do you worry about most in relation to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict?

What do you most hope for?

What values or worldviews do you hold that relate to those worries and hopes? (Your worldview incorporates your assumptions about how the world works, about human nature, about what is or isn't possible, etc.)

*Note: The third question can be difficult for some people. Allow a long pause for silent reflection after you read the question. You may also want to use the “popcorn” format with this question.*

#### *Possible Second Go-Round*

Please choose one of the values and basic assumptions that you brought up tonight and that you'd like to talk about a bit more. You can also choose something that someone else mentioned but that resonates for you as well. Can you share a particular experience or influence in your life that had a strong role in shaping that value or assumption?

### **10. Feeling Safe and Unsafe, Secure and Insecure**

#### *First Go-Round*

What makes you feel safe, secure, welcome, or accepted in the world as a Jew?

What makes you feel unsafe, insecure, unwelcome, or unaccepted in the world as a Jew?

#### *Second Go-Round*

How do these feelings affect your perspective on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict?

*Note: You may want to use only one or two of these words; “safe,” “secure,” “welcome,” and “accepted,” rather than all four.*

### **11. Personal Experiences and Identity**

#### *First Go-Round*

How do you think your experience as a Jew affects the way you perceive or relate to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict?

*Second Go-Round*

How do you think your experience as an American affects the way you relate to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict? If you are not from the U.S., or if you identify more with another place, how do you think your background in that place affects the way you relate to the conflict?

*Possible Third Go-Round*

Are there other aspects of your identity that you think affect the way you relate to the conflict?

**12. Views about History**

*First Go-Round*

What ideas about history or lessons from history do you think about when you consider your views about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict or how it might be resolved? (This could include the history of the conflict, as well as other relevant history.)

Are there aspects of history that you are struggling with or that challenge your basic view?

**13. Sorting out Feelings**

*First Go-Round*

Some people who've attended past dialogue programs have said that they find it difficult at times to figure out when their feelings about the situation are grounded in reality and when they're getting carried away. Other people say they feel a number of different emotions at once, and have trouble untangling them. Have you struggled at all to understand your feelings about the situation? Can you talk about one or more of those struggles in particular?

*Second Go-Round*

What has helped you sort out your feelings?

What have others done to help you, or what would you appreciate from others?

**14. Assumptions about Conflict**

*First Go-Round*

Think about some of the assumptions you make about how people should deal with conflict in general. Can you describe some of your assumptions?

Can you relate a specific experience in your life that has shaped the way you think about conflict? It may be useful to think back to your childhood or your adolescence and to describe a particularly powerful early experience.

*Second Go-Round*

How do these assumptions relate to what you hope to see happen in relation to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict?

## **15. Assumptions and Ideas about the Palestinians**

### *First Go-Round*

How do you understand the actions, experiences, and motivations of Palestinians?

What generalizations do you make as you think about the answer to this question?

Do you have any ideas or experiences that challenge those generalizations?

### *Second Go-Round*

How have you learned about the Palestinians?

What else do you want or need to find out?

## **16. Assumptions and Ideas about Israelis**

### *First Go-Round*

How do you understand the actions, experiences, and motivations of people in Israel?

What generalizations do you make as you think about the answer to this question?

Do you have any ideas or experiences that challenge those generalizations?

### *Second Go-Round*

How have you learned about the Israelis?

What else do you want or need to find out?

## **Making Decisions & Taking Action**

### **17. Making a Difference in the U.S.**

#### *First Go-Round*

What do you think our government, activists, journalists, philanthropists, and other people in the U.S. are doing, or could do, to help or hurt the situation?

#### *Second Go-Round*

How do you think you personally can help or hurt the situation, even in small ways?

#### *Third Go-Round*

As you've listened to each other's ideas about what helps and hurts, what commonalities and differences have you noticed?

### **18. Reflecting on Our Own Actions**

#### *First Go-Round*

What actions have you taken in response to the conflict that you make you feel proud?

Is there anything you wish you'd done differently in the past as you've responded to the conflict? (You may wish to share actions you've taken, or that you have considered taking, that would surprise others to learn about.)

### **19. Wrestling with Difficult Decisions**

#### *First Go-Round*

As you consider how to respond to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, what are the most difficult decisions you have to make? These decisions can relate to activist work or to situations you face in your everyday life—for example, your kids asking you a challenging question about the conflict. You may wish to talk about a decision that was difficult for you in the past, or a difficult choice that you're grappling with right now.

#### *Second Go-Round*

Having heard each other's stories and dilemmas, are there any lessons for you?

Are there any implications for the kind of support you'd like to have in this group or elsewhere in your life as you grapple with difficult decisions?

## 20. Models for Effective Action

### *First Go-Round*

When you take action in response to the conflict, or when you think about taking action, which people or organizations do you look to for inspiration? These could be people here in the U.S., people in the Middle East, or people elsewhere in the world. You may want to talk about people who are alive now, figures from history, or both.

In what ways do they inspire you?

In what ways do you model your own actions on these examples or look to them for direction or guidance?

## 21. What Are Our Strengths?

### *First Go-Round*

As a Jew living in the U.S., what kind of power do you think you have to influence the situation in a positive way? What personal strengths do you think you bring to the task of responding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict? (You may wish to talk about aspects of your character, skills, knowledge, etc.)

What strengths do you think others in the U.S.—Jewish and non-Jewish—bring to this task?

*Note: This question is best used in a group that has identified significant common ground.*

## **How We Learn About the Conflict and Arrive At Our Conclusions**

### **22. Learning about Israel and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict**

#### *First Go-Round*

Think about the different ways you've learned about Israel and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict over the course of your life. What sources of information about Israel and the conflict influenced you most as a child?

What experiences affected you most?

What sources of information and experiences affected you most as teenager? As a young adult?

What information sources are especially influential in your life now?

#### *Second Go-Round*

What have you learned over time that challenged or reinforced earlier ideas?

How did you learn this?

What do you most want to learn at this point in your life?

#### *Optional Third Go-Round*

What concerns or hopes do you have for younger Jews who are learning about the conflict now?

How is the world they live in different from the one you lived in as a child or teenager?

### **23. How Do We Decide Which Sources of Information to Trust?**

#### *First Go-Round*

We all take in information about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in a variety of ways. How do you decide which sources of information about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to trust?

When you don't fully trust a particular source of information, how do you think about what you're taking in?

#### *Second Go-Round*

Are you currently interested in gathering more information about the conflict in a deliberate way? If so, where/how do you imagine gathering that information? Why does that seem like a trustworthy source? Are there any learning objectives that you'd like to propose for this group to pursue together?

#### *Alternative Second Go-Round*

How have you tried to make sense of the situation through reading and study?

Have you been reading or consulting any books, articles, newspapers, etc. that you think are especially important because they (a) convey information that you'd like others to have and/or (b) challenge some of your assumptions or convictions in useful way?

## **How We Talk About the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict**

### **24. Conversations about the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly**

#### *First Go-Round*

Please think about your experiences in conversations with other Jews about the conflict. In particular, please try to think of a time—outside of this dialogue—when you were able to express yourself well, listen well, and talk across difference in a constructive manner.

What do you think made it possible? What did you or others contribute? Was there something about the context that supported your having a constructive or satisfying exchange?

#### *Second Go-Round*

When conversations have gone badly, what did you or others bring or fail to bring? In what ways did the context of the conversation affect what happened?

#### *Third Go-Round*

As you reflect on these experiences, what ideas do you have about how you can find more support for yourself or give more support to others in conversations about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict?

### **25. Being Understood by Other Jews and by Non-Jews**

#### *First Go-Round*

Think about the ways that you feel understood or misunderstood by your Jewish friends or family. What concerns and hopes about Israel and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict do you have that you would like your Jewish friends or family to understand better?

What about your non-Jewish friends (or family)? Others?

#### *Second Go-Round*

Think about all the different kinds of conversations you have about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, who you talk with, and how you say things. What ways of talking help you to be understood?

Do you have any ways of talking about this that you think might get in the way of being understood?

### **26. Respect and Disrespect**

#### *First Go-Round*

In difficult conversations about the conflict, what signals respect for you?

What signals disrespect for you?

If you can, please give concrete examples from your experience of times you have felt respected or disrespected.

#### *Second Go-Round*

What have you heard, if anything, that surprises you and/or may alter your own ways of being in conversations about the conflict?

**Engaging With Israel and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict  
In Your Own Synagogue, School, Organization, or Local Community**

**27. Engaging with Israel and the Conflict in Our Community: Appreciation, Frustration, and Hopes**

*First Go-Round*

What do you appreciate most about the way this synagogue community/school community/local Jewish community relates to Israel and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict?

What do you find most upsetting or worrisome?

*Second Go-Round*

How would you like to see the community engage with Israel and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the future?

Imagine that a year from now, you come into the school/synagogue/community center one Sunday morning. You look at the flyers on the bulletin board, skim through the list of upcoming events, talk with a friend who you more or less agree with and then with another person who you strongly disagree with. You are struck by the fact that the community is responding to the conflict in a way that makes you feel proud, hopeful, and welcome. Describe what's happening. Please be as specific as possible.

*Optional Third Go-Round*

What strengths do you think you bring to the synagogue's/school's/organization's exploration of this issue?

What strengths do you think other members of the community bring?

**28. Open Disagreement in Your Community/Synagogue/School/Organization**

*First Go-Round*

How does it affect you when members of this community disagree strongly?

What do you value about having disagreement openly expressed vs. "underground"?

What can or does happen that makes open disagreement divisive and costly to the community?

*Second Go-Round*

If the community as a whole agreed to some helpful communication guidelines or explicit values related to talking across different views, what might they be?

*Alternate wording:* If the participants in a dialogue group do not share a particular synagogue or community, this question may still be useful. Ask them to talk about "your" community rather than "this" community.



## **Exploring the Meaning of Controversial Words**

### **29. Exploring Different Meanings of Key Controversial Words**

In many conversations about controversial issues, participants will use and understand a particular word or phrase in different ways. “Zionism,” “the Jewish community,” and “anti-Semitism” are good examples. If a group has identified such a word or phrase, this set of questions may be helpful.

The group can also examine the meanings of controversial words in a less formal way. If it becomes clear during a dialogue session that people are using a key word in different ways, participants sometimes ask each other during the connected conversation what it means to them. You as the facilitator can also pose a question about this during the connected conversation: “That word often has different meanings for different people. Can you say what it means to you?”

#### *First Go-Round*

What does “X” mean to you?

What images, metaphors and memories come to your mind when you think about “X”?

Are there key moments in your own life history when those meanings “gelled” for you, or gained new meaning, or shifted in meaning?

#### *Possible Segue to Connected Conversation*

Is there anything you’ve heard that sheds new light on a difference that you had experienced in this dialogue or in other conversations?

## Other Topics

### 30. The Media: Its Impact on You and on the Conflict

#### *First Go-Round*

When you read or see reports about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, or commentary in the newspaper, on TV or radio, or on the Internet:

What is most upsetting about the way the conflict is reported?

Why do you think it upsets you?

What do you think it is about you, your life experiences or your values that makes that so upsetting?

What kinds of reporting do find laudable, encouraging, or helpful (perhaps because they challenge you in a useful way)?

What do you think it is about you, your life experiences or your values that makes this reporting helpful or encouraging to you?

#### *Second Go-Round*

What reports or kinds of reporting have you seen or heard that challenged you in a useful way?

What do you think helped you to feel open to that challenge?

#### *Possible Third Go-Round*

How do you understand the impact of the media on the conflict?

How do you think the situation can be improved?

How can you encourage that improvement, if only in a small way?

### 31. Jewish Education

#### *First Go-Round*

How have you learned about Israel and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in Jewish education programs? (These could include day schools, Sunday schools, summer camps, after school programs, adult education programs, and others.)

#### *Second Go-Round*

What kinds of teaching about Israel and the conflict do you think are most useful?

What kinds of teaching about Israel and the conflict trouble you?

## **Questions for Use with Videos, Readings, and other Prompts**

### **32. Questions for Use with Videos, Readings, or Another Common Stimulus**

There are many ways to incorporate videos, readings, and speakers into dialogue programs. You can screen a video and then follow up with one or more go-round questions and connected conversation. You can also have the participants take turns reading aloud from one or more brief articles or quotes, examine a cartoon together, or listen to a speaker or a panel. Alternatively, the participants may agree to read something or watch a film between meetings, rather than during the meeting.

Section 4.3.4 offers guidance on designing a session of this type, including some caveats. Some common and very general go-round questions appear below.

#### *First Go-Round*

- What moved you, resonated with you, or surprised you?
- Was there a memorable moment or quotable quote that you would like to remember?
- Was there anything you found uncomfortable or upsetting or, perhaps, challenging in a positive way?
- Is there anything you'd like to share about yourself or your life experiences that might help others to understand your responses?

#### *Second Go-Round*

- What most interested you about your response?
- What most interested you about the responses that others spoke about?
- As you watch/listened, what were you curious to learn about others' responses, or is there something you're curious to learn from another participant now about his/her responses?

## **Religion and Spirituality**

### **33. Faith, Spirituality, and Philosophy**

#### *First Go-Round*

How does your faith in God, your spirituality, or your philosophy affect the way you think and feel about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict? For example, how does it influence what you hope for or your sense of what you should do?

#### *Second Go-Round*

Are there questions or uncertainties that you're wrestling with in your spiritual practice or your relationship with God that influence the way you relate to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict?

#### *Third Go-Round or Segue to Connected Conversation*

What do you most want to understand about people whose ideas and feelings about God or spirituality are different from yours in this context?

### **34. Questions for Use with Jewish Religious Texts**

Some groups may want to incorporate discussion of Jewish texts such as passages from the Torah or the Talmud into their dialogue programs. In these cases, the group can build a session around two passages that offer different perspectives on a key ethical dilemma. Volunteers can read each passage aloud, and then the participants can take turns answering these questions.

#### *First Go-Round*

What do you think this text is saying?

What resonates for you in this text? What lessons or guidance does this suggest to you for the current situation?

#### *Second Go-Round*

Is there anything about this text that disturbs you or worries you? What cautions do you hope others will keep in mind when interpreting or applying this text?

## **Entering the Conversation Deliberately and with Special Care**

### **35. Considering Whether to Plan a Dialogue Program, and if so, With What Considerations**

This format offers participants an opportunity to decide together whether to plan a full-scale dialogue and it lays the groundwork for planning a promising dialogue if participants choose to move ahead. Like the other question sets presented here in Section 7.5, these questions be preceded by appropriate introductory material of the sort presented in Section 7.1. See also Section 4.2.5.

#### *First Go-Round*

Please introduce yourself and say:

- Just two or three sentences about who you are (e.g. something about your work, play, family, or interests)
- What has been important or meaningful to you about your involvement in this community?

#### *Second Go-Round*

If you were to be involved in a dialogue in this community, about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, what hopes and fears would you bring?

Can you say anything about your own life history that might help others understand those hopes and fears?

#### *Question Asking*

Does anyone have a question you would like to ask another participant? Is there something someone said that you'd like to understand better?

#### *Discussion*

Have you heard something that stirred fresh ideas or feelings about how it might matter — for better or worse — if this community were to have dialogue on these issues?

*and/or*

Do you have ideas about what might make it easier — or harder — for you to participate in such a dialogue, if one were offered? Or more or less attractive?

*and/or*

Whether or not a dialogue is planned, what do you think you can do to make it easier for others to speak openly and constructively on this topic in this (synagogue/organization)? Is there anything you'd like to ask of others to help you speak openly and constructively?

#### *Next Steps (if there is interest in future dialogue)*

What ideas do you have about next steps (time, place, group composition, etc.)? Do the agreements we made tonight seem adequate for future dialogues? What would you do differently? What would you do similarly?

# Appendix A

## What We Mean By Dialogue

### ***What dialogue is***

The “dialogues” that the Public Conversations Project designs and facilitates are conversations in which the participants’ primary goal is to pursue mutual understanding rather than agreement or immediate solutions. As participants pursue this goal, they sometimes decide to pursue other goals as well. For example, dialogue groups sometimes decide to become better informed together, or to build consensus about ways that they can act on shared values.

### ***What dialogue is not***

Dialogue is distinct from debate; in fact, participants in dialogue often agree explicitly to set aside persuasion and debate so that they can focus on mutual understanding. Dialogue is also different from mediation, conflict resolution, and problem solving although it may serve as a prelude to or aspect of such processes.

### ***What participants do***

- They listen and are listened to with care.
- They speak and are spoken to in a respectful manner.
- They share “airtime” so that all speakers can be heard
- They learn about the perspectives of others.
- They reflect on their own views.

### ***What participants gain***

- Mutual understanding, which may stimulate new ideas for learning and action
- Communication skills that can be used in other difficult conversations

### ***What it takes***

Dialogue takes place any time people genuinely seek mutual understanding, setting aside for that time, the urge to persuade or the pressure to decide. It can occur spontaneously, among friends, in classrooms, in organizations, or even among strangers. When people are experiencing polarized conflict, however, we have found that it is helpful if they:

- Have clarity and consensus about the purposes of the conversation
- Make communication agreements that will help them to achieve their purposes
- Have a facilitator whose sole responsibility is to help the participants honor their agreements and reach their shared purposes

## Appendix B

### Distinguishing Debate from Dialogue

DEBATE	DIALOGUE
Pre-meeting communication between sponsors and participants is minimal and largely irrelevant to what follows.	Pre-meeting contacts and preparation of participants are essential elements of the full process.
Participants tend to be leaders known for propounding a carefully crafted position. The personas displayed in the debate are usually already familiar to the public. The behavior of the participants tends to conform to stereotypes.	Those chosen to participate are not necessarily outspoken “leaders.” Whoever they are, they speak as individuals whose own unique experiences differ in some respect from others on their “side.” Their behavior is likely to vary in some degree and along some dimensions from stereotypic images others may hold of them.
The atmosphere is threatening; attacks and interruptions are expected by participants and are usually permitted by moderators.	The atmosphere is one of safety; facilitators propose, get agreement on, and enforce clear ground rules to enhance safety and promote respectful exchange.
Participants speak as representatives of groups.	Participants speak as individuals, from their own unique experience.
Participants speak to their own constituents and, perhaps, to the undecided middle.	Participants speak to each other.
Differences within “sides” are denied or minimized.	Differences among participants on the same “side” are revealed, as individual and personal foundations of beliefs and values are explored.
Participants express unswerving commitment to a point of view, approach, or idea.	Participants express uncertainties, as well as deeply held beliefs.
Participants listen in order to refute the other side’s data and to expose faulty logic in their arguments. Questions are asked from a position of certainty. These questions are often rhetorical challenges or disguised statements.	Participants listen to understand and gain insight into the beliefs and concerns of the others. Questions are asked from a position of curiosity.
Statements are predictable and offer little new information.	New information surfaces.
Success requires simple impassioned statements.	Success requires exploration of the complexities of the issue being discussed.
Debates operate within the constraints of the dominant public discourse. (The discourse defines the problem and the options for resolution. It assumes that fundamental needs and values are already clearly understood.)	Participants are encouraged to question the dominant public discourse, that is, to express fundamental needs that may or may not be reflected in the discourse and to explore various options for problem definition and resolution. Participants may discover inadequacies in the usual language and concepts used in the public debate.

*This table contrasts debate as commonly seen on television with the kind of dialogue we aim to promote in dialogue sessions conducted by the Public Conversations Project.*

## Appendix C

### **Talking about the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: Exploring the Roots and Complexities of Our Perspectives\***

#### **Welcome and Orientation**

#### **Proposed Communication Agreements (see second page)**

#### **Introductions**

#### **First Go-Round** (3 minutes each)

- How have events related to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict affected you personally?
- Is there something you'd be willing to share about your life experiences that might help others understand your response to the conflict?

#### **Second Go-Round** (2 minutes each)

- As you think about your perspective on the conflict, what's at the heart of the matter for you?

#### **Third Go-Round** (3 minutes each)

- Please speak about any value conflicts, gray areas or uncertainties you've experienced. For example, perhaps you can think of a time when the values you hold dear related to this issue bumped up against other values that are also important to you—or a time when you felt yourself pulled in two directions.

#### **Connected Conversation**

#### **Parting Words**

\* Taken from "Constructive Conversations about the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: A Guide for Convening and Facilitating Dialogue in Jewish Communities in the U.S." produced by Public Conversations Project (Watertown, MA), in collaboration with the Jewish Dialogue Group (Philadelphia, PA) (c) 2004



## PROPOSED AGREEMENTS

Regarding the **spirit** of our speaking and listening:

1. We will speak for ourselves and allow others to speak for themselves. We will not expect ourselves or others to represent, defend, or explain an entire group.
2. We will not criticize the views of others or attempt to persuade them.
3. We will listen with resilience, “hanging in” when we hear something that is hard to hear.

Regarding the **form** of our speaking and listening:

4. We will participate within the time frames suggested by the facilitator.
5. We will not interrupt except to indicate that we cannot hear a speaker.
6. We will “pass” or “pass for now” if we are not ready or willing to respond to a question.

Regarding **confidentiality**

7. When we discuss our experience here with people outside the group, we will not attach names or any other identifying information to particular comments unless we have permission to do so.

## PATHWAYS TO A CONNECTED CONVERSATION

- **Note a point of learning:**

Have you heard something that stirred fresh thoughts or feelings?

- **Pick up and weave a thread:**

Has an interesting theme or idea emerged that you'd like to add to?

- **Clarify differences:**

Have you heard something you disagreed with? If so, first check to see if you understood it correctly. Then say what was unsettling to you about what you heard and why.

- **Ask a question:**

Is there something someone said that you'd like to understand better? If you ask a question, be sure it reflects genuine curiosity and is not a challenge in disguise.

## Appendix D

### **A Tale of Two Grandmothers or, There's More Than One Good Way to Facilitate Dialogue**

by Bob Stains, PCP's Program Director

When I think about how to apply the PCP approach, I'm reminded of the very different ways that my two grandmothers made pasta sauce. On the English side, my great-grandmother Elsie Stains was very clear about what it took to make sauce: a recipe. Six large, peeled tomatoes. One tablespoon of oregano. One-and-a-half teaspoons of salt. The ingredients were to be measured out, mixed, and heated in the prescribed manner. As a young boy, it was great to help Grandma Stains make sauce, because I always knew what to do.

Another approach was taken by my Italian grandmother, Luigina Miglioranzi ("Nonna"). Nonna held whatever recipes she had in her heart. She too would begin with tomatoes, but then was in constant conversation with the sauce-to-be. "What do you need?" she would say in broken English, as she tossed "just a pinch" of salt or oregano or cloves into the pot. Then a taste from the wooden spoon. Pause. Again, "What do you need?" She would continue on in this manner, interacting with the bubbling mixture, until it was "right;" until the correct balance of ingredients was achieved and they had "married;" until it could be pronounced "sauce." I still carry the exquisite taste with me. It was harder to help Nonna because I didn't go back with sauce as far as she did. As I've grown older, though, I've grown more adventurous. I've been in conversation with sauce for some years, sharing the taste with family and friends.

As you approach the adventure of dialogue, remember that there are different ways to make a marvelous sauce. It may be more fitting and comfortable for you to stick with the "recipe" approach, especially if you are new to facilitation. It's good to be reminded about what ingredients are necessary for dialogue, and to be able to put them together in basic, tried-and-true ways. There are detailed resources in this guide and other sections of this website that will support you.

On the other hand, you may feel more comfortable relying on your own intuition. In this case, you'll want to explore the variety of options offered in each section of the guide. Perhaps you'll use some of our suggested questions and formats; perhaps you'll develop your own. Just stay attuned to the character and mood of your group. Be in conversation with the members about what's working and be prepared to adjust to fit their needs.

Regardless of which approach you are more comfortable with, we hope that you carry the "spirit" of dialogue into your thinking, your planning, and your facilitation. If you are rooted in this, whether you have followed a more structured or more fluid approach, participants will leave having tasted something new.

# Appendix E

## Participant Feedback Form

1. What was most satisfying, enriching, or valuable about your experience in the dialogue?

2. What was less than satisfying, frustrating, or disappointing?

3. Can you say something about what you are taking away from the experience?

4. What advice or suggestions can you offer for future dialogues?

5. Other comments?

Name: *(optional)*

## Facilitator Feedback Form

Please share your feedback with us at Public Conversations Project ([info@publicconversations.org](mailto:info@publicconversations.org)) and the Jewish Dialogue Group ([info@jewishdialogue.org](mailto:info@jewishdialogue.org)). See Section 1.6 for phone numbers and mailing addresses.

Facilitator's Name and Address:

E-Mail and Phone:

1. What was the topic of the dialogue? How did you go about setting it up?  
(Attach a sample invitation or notice if you are willing to share it.)
2. Who came? What was the range and intensity of their views?
3. Which parts of the guide did you use?
4. What specific questions did you ask the participants to address?
5. How did it go? What went especially well? What was difficult?
6. Did you use alternatives to what is offered in the guide that worked especially well?
7. What did participants value about the conversation?

8. What did they find difficult or disappointing?

9. What suggestions did they have for improvement?

10. What advice do you have for people planning to organize and facilitate a similar dialogue?

11. If we publish a revised edition of this guide, what changes or additions do you recommend?

## Appendix F

### Talking with Potential Participants About Their Hopes for Dialogue

#### Purposes

From the moment we begin to consider working on a dialogue initiative, until the meeting takes place, we engage in many conversations with potential participants and others with the following purposes in mind:

- to prepare ourselves to be informed, effective designers and facilitators of dialogue
- to ask questions that foster reflection in participants on their experience of the conflict to date and what they would like in the future for themselves and the community
- to begin to build collaborative relationships with participants—relationships characterized by curiosity, new learning, respect, and trust

#### Questions

The questions that we ask vary with the situation and the phase of planning. We rarely ask only the questions we have prepared in advance. Many other questions emerge during the conversation in response to what we learn. However, we often ask about:

- 1) How things are in the community now. (From where you are, how do you see the current situation? What needs to happen? Who should be involved? etc.)
- 2) How things got to be this way and who the key players are.
- 3) Where the under-tapped resources reside. These resources are often revealed in experiences that stand in contrast to the account of the situation focused on problems, e.g., a time when an exchange was satisfying or effective. (What happened? How did it come about? What became possible? What part did the respondents or others play?)
- 4) The wishes, visions, and hopes that the respondents have for a less divisive way of talking about the issues or managing their differences. (When eliciting this account, we seek to move beyond generalities to learn what they specifically hope for in a context that matters to them, e.g., in an organization or faith community.)
- 5) Participants' hopes and concerns for the proposed dialogue, both during the meeting and when it is over.
- 6) What the respondents (and others) might need in order to participate in the proposed dialogue. (Often mentioned are ground rules, time frame, procedures, and goals for the meeting; the presence of particular people; and facilitators who have done some key background reading.)
- 7) What potential participants would want to personally restrain or practice in order to participate as their "best" selves in such a meeting.

## Appendix G

### Sample Invitation to a Series of Five Meetings

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

We are writing to invite you to join us in a five-session series of Jewish-Jewish dialogues on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The first of the five meetings will be on **Tuesday, October 12, 2004** from 7:00 pm to 9:30 PM at the home of Larry Spetzer, 255 Highland Street, Somerset. The other four meetings will be scheduled at the first meeting so that we can try to accommodate everyone's schedules.

We are convening this group, not under any official auspices, but simply as individual members of TBS who care about the situation in Israel and who have found that, all too often, when talking with our Jewish friends, family members, and fellow members of TBS, we get swept into a polemic debate or choose to be silent. In this dialogue series, we hope to offer a third alternative: an opportunity to speak candidly about our personal views and the experiences that have shaped them, as well as to listen open-heartedly to others whose views and experiences are different from our own.

We are reaching out to people who we believe might share our wish for a safe space to:

- share their own perspectives and come to a better understanding of the perspectives of others
- learn along side people with different viewpoints
- reflect on their own views in fresh ways

We aim to convene a diverse group of eight individuals, all of whom will be TBS members. Rabbi Blumberg is aware of our plans and he is very supportive. In fact, he will look forward to hearing how this series goes and will welcome recommendations about ways to foster more dialogue in the community.

If you participate, we will ask you to commit to all five sessions. If the group wishes to continue to meet after five sessions, we can discuss this. There will be no pressure to continue.

The dialogue series will be professionally facilitated by Maggie Herzig, a Senior Associate of the Public Conversations Project in Watertown who has facilitated both intra-Jewish and Arab-Jewish dialogues and who has collaborated with the Jewish Dialogue Group of Philadelphia to produce a guide for dialogue among Jews about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (see [www.publicconversations.org](http://www.publicconversations.org) or [www.jdg.org](http://www.jdg.org)).

Our first session will involve a fair amount of structured conversation in which people will take turns responding to specific questions. The second and third sessions will probably be less structured. They will be designed with your input. Your input and feedback will be especially valuable when we consider together any recommendations we might want to pass on to Rabbi Blumberg. Thus, we hope you will join us in a pioneering spirit.

Maggie has asked us to preview for you some communication agreements that she will propose for our time together. We can modify them if we wish; they represent only a “draft.” They are:

1. We will speak for ourselves, not as representatives of a group, and we will not ask others to represent, defend, or explain an entire group.
2. We will avoid making grand pronouncements and, instead, connect what we know and believe to our experiences, influences in our lives, particular sources of information, etc.
3. We will express our different viewpoints in a thoughtful manner and without a critical or insulting spirit, keeping in mind the goals of learning and reflection, and resisting the urge to persuade others.
4. We will listen with resilience, “hanging in” when we hear something that is hard to hear.
5. We will share “airtime” and refrain from interrupting others.
6. We will “pass” or “pass for now” if we are not ready or willing to respond to a question — no explanation required.
7. If asked to keep something confidential, we will honor the request. In conversations outside of the group we won’t attribute particular statements to particular individuals by name or identifying information without permission.
8. We’ll avoid making negative attributions about the beliefs, values, and motives of other participants, for example, “you only say that because...” When tempted to do so, we’ll consider the possibility of testing the assumption we’re making by asking a question that represent our genuine curiosity.
9. Between meetings we’ll use e-mail for scheduling but not for substantive discussion.

If you express interest in participating, you will get a phone call from Maggie before the meeting which will offer you an opportunity to discuss any hopes and concerns you might have, and it will give Maggie a chance to begin to get to know you.

If you have questions for either of us, don’t hesitate to call or e-mail. Please RSVP as soon as possible so that we can complete our process of group formation in time for our first meeting. If you are interested but the date doesn’t work for you, please let us know so we can try to work out a schedule that works well for all who are interested.

We hope you can join us.

Sincerely,

Name and Contact Info

Name and Contact Info



## Appendix H

Would you like to have a respectful, constructive discussion with people whose views about Israel are different from yours—without arguing or debating?



Are you interested in talking about your questions or ambivalence without being attacked or lectured?

---

**The Jewish Dialogue Group invites Jewish people of all backgrounds and perspectives to an introductory**

# **Community Dialogue**

## **about the**

# **Israeli-Palestinian conflict:**

**Wednesday, February 11, 6:45 – 9:00 P. M.**

**Congregation Ohev Shalom**

**2 Chester Road, Wallingford, PA**

Near the intersection of Routes 252 and 320

For detailed directions, visit [www.ohev.net/directions.html](http://www.ohev.net/directions.html)

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This workshop will provide a safe environment in which people can share their concerns, hopes, fears, convictions, and questions; listen respectfully to others; and explore their own and others' perspectives.

The Jewish Dialogue Group is a non-partisan grassroots organization made that works to foster up constructive dialogue with Jewish communities about the Israeli-Palestinian. Our board members and volunteers represent a wide range of political perspectives. As an organization, we do not take positions on any issues, but focus solely on fostering dialogue, reflection, and deliberation. Since we formed in 2001, our facilitators have led more than fifty dialogue sessions in synagogues, schools, and other venues around the Philadelphia area.

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**For more information about this dialogue or about the Jewish Dialogue Group, visit [www.jewishdialogue.org](http://www.jewishdialogue.org), email [info@jewishdialogue.org](mailto:info@jewishdialogue.org) or call 215-266-1218.**

## What to Expect at the Workshop

- The dialogue consists of facilitated small group conversations. Participants take turns responding to a set of questions, then hold a facilitated discussion.
- The dialogue will be a structured conversation, not a debate, a negotiation, or a mediation. We will encourage people to explore their disagreements and their own areas of uncertainty or confusion. We will ask people to seek to understand these uncertainties and differences more fully, not to try to resolve or dismiss them.
- The dialogue will take place in an environment in which participants can speak and be spoken to in a manner that respects their shared humanity and fosters mutual understanding.

## Terms of Participation

All participants will be expected to observe the following ground rules:

- Listen attentively.
- Speak honestly in ways that promote learning and genuine inquiry.
- Seek to understand each other.
- Refrain from explicit or implicit attack or persuasion.
- Omit language that any participant experiences as disrespectful.
- Treat what others say as confidential.

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## More about the Jewish Dialogue Group

### Who We Are

The Jewish Dialogue Group is a non-partisan Philadelphia-based organization that works to promote constructive dialogue within the Jewish community about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We are made up entirely of volunteers, and we are not affiliated with any other organization. While we share a commitment to values of justice and compassion, we have many different views on the conflict and on how we should respond. As an organization we do not take positions on any issues, but focus solely on promoting dialogue, deliberation, and reflection.

### Why Dialogue?

Many people are looking for more useful ways to discuss the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. For many Jews, discussion about this issue can be extremely difficult. People with strong convictions about the situation often find themselves in bitter, polarized arguments with others whose views are different, talking yet not being heard. At the same time, people who feel ambivalent or confused often have trouble finding a place where they can discuss their feelings, ideas, and questions openly, without being attacked from one side or the other. Many Jews feel put off from discussing the conflict because they think they don't know enough, or are because they expect that when they confront painful and confusing issues, it will only make them feel worse. Structured, facilitated dialogue sessions can enable people to hold conversations that might otherwise not be possible.

# Appendix I

## Self-Help Tools for Participants

1. **If you feel *cut off***, say so or override the interruption. (“I’d like to finish...”)
2. **If you feel *misunderstood***, clarify what you mean. (“Let me put this another way . . . .”)
3. **If you feel *misheard***, ask the listener to repeat what she heard you say and affirm or correct her statement.
4. **If you feel *hurt or disrespected***, say so. If possible, describe exactly what you heard or saw that evoked hurt feelings in you. (“When you said X, I felt Y . . . .” where “X” refers to specific language.) If it is hard to think of what to say, just say, “OUCH” to flag your reaction.
5. **If you feel *angry***, express the anger directly (e.g., “I felt angry when I heard you say X . . . .”) rather than expressing it or acting it out indirectly (e.g., by trashing another person’s statement or asking a sarcastic or rhetorical question.)
6. **If you feel *confused***, frame a question that seeks clarification or more information. You may prefer to paraphrase what you have heard. (“Are you saying that . . . ?”)
7. **If you feel *uncomfortable***, with the process, state your discomfort and check in with the group to see how others are experiencing what is happening. “I’m not comfortable with the tension I’m feeling in the room right now and I’m wondering how others are feeling.” If others share your concerns and you have an idea about what would help, offer that idea. “How about taking a one-minute time-out to reflect on what we are trying to do together?”
8. **If you feel the conversation is *going off track***, share your perception, and check in with others. “I thought we were going to discuss x before moving to y, but it seems that we bypassed x and are focusing on y. Is that right?” (If so) “I’d like to get back to x and hear from more people about it.”

(c) 2004 Public Conversations Project, Watertown, MA

# Appendix J-1

## Proposed Agreements

Regarding the **spirit** of our speaking and listening

1. We will speak for ourselves and allow others to speak for themselves, with no pressure to represent or explain a whole group.
2. We will not criticize the views of others or attempt to persuade them.
3. We will listen with resilience, “hanging in” when we hear something that is hard to hear.
4. If tempted to make attributions about the beliefs of others (*e.g.*, “*You just believe that because...*”) we will instead, consider asking a question to check out the assumption we are making, (*for example*, “*Do you believe that because...*” or “*What leads you to that belief?*”).

Regarding the **form** of our speaking and listening

5. We will participate within the time frames suggested by the facilitator and share “airtime.”
6. We will not interrupt except to indicate that we cannot hear a speaker.
7. We will “pass” or “pass for now” if we are not ready or willing to respond to a question.

Regarding the **broader community**

8. When we discuss our experience here with people outside the group, we will not attach names or any other identifying information to particular comments unless we have permission to do so.
9. If we refer by name to other community members who are not present, we will show them the same respect that we intend to show each other.

## Appendix J-2

### Proposed Agreements

1. **We will speak for ourselves.** We won't try to represent a whole group, and we will not ask others to represent, defend, or explain an entire group.
2. **We will avoid making grand pronouncements** and, instead, connect what we know and believe to our experiences, influences in our lives, particular sources of information, etc.
3. **We will refrain from characterizing the views of others in a critical spirit,** keeping in mind that we're here to understand each other, not to persuade each other.
4. **We will listen with resilience,** "hanging in" when we hear something that is hard to hear.
5. **We will share "airtime" and refrain from interrupting others.**
6. **We will "pass" or "pass for now"** if we are not ready or willing to respond to a question —no explanation required.
7. **If asked to keep something confidential, we will honor the request.** In conversations outside of the group we won't attribute particular statements to particular individuals by name or identifying information without permission.
8. **We'll avoid making negative attributions** about the beliefs, values, and motives of other participants, for example, "You only say that because..." When tempted to do so, we'll consider the possibility of testing the assumption we're making by asking a question, for example, "Why is that important to you?"
9. **We'll use e-mail only for scheduling,** not for substantive discussion.

# Appendix K

## Contributing to a Connected Conversation

- **Ask a question**

Is there something someone said that you'd like to understand better? If you ask a question, be sure it reflects genuine curiosity and is not a challenge in disguise.

- **Note a point of learning**

Have you heard something that stirred fresh thoughts or feelings?

- **Pick up and weave a thread**

Has an interesting theme or idea emerged that you'd like to add to?

- **Clarify differences**

Have you heard something you disagreed with? If so, first check to see if you understood it correctly. Then say what was unsettling to you about what you heard and why.

# Appendix L

## Talking About the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict A One-Hour Mini-Dialogue

### I. Welcome, Orientation, Instructions for Small Groups

### II. Proposed Communication Agreements

- Accept “Pass” as a response.
- Honor whatever confidentiality requests are made at the end.
- Abide by time and structure boundaries for speaking and listening.
- When another person is speaking, listen fully, tapping into your genuine curiosity about their perspectives and experience.

### III. Dialogue in Groups of Three

#### A. Get introduced and prepared.

- Introduce yourselves if you don't already know each other.
- Identify one person to monitor time.
- Affirm or revise the proposed communication agreements and commit to reminding each other if they are forgotten.

#### B. Reflect on these questions for three or four minutes.

- 1) What is at the heart of your passion or concern about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (and/or the ways we do or don't talk about it in our community)? What would you be willing to share about your life experience that might help others understand your passion or concern?
- 2) Within your general perspective on the conflict and the issues that surround it, do you experience any value conflicts, gray areas or dilemmas?

#### C. Go-Round on question #1.

Speakers, take up to three minutes to respond.

Listeners, just listen and notice what you'd like to understand more about what you are hearing. If you find yourself making assumptions or wanting to ask questions, please just set aside or jot down a note about those assumptions and questions aside. You'll have a chance soon to ask each other questions and check out assumptions.

#### D. Repeat the same process for Question #2.

#### E. Ask each other questions arising from your curiosity.

This is the time to ask each other questions that arise from your genuine curiosity about another person's experience. If you remember having made an assumption while the other person was speaking, this is also a time to ask that person a question, to check out your

assumption. This isn't a time to make statements, offer advice, or compare your own experience to another person's—it's a time to understand the other person's experience more fully.

**F. Prepare to transition back to the full group.**

- Make parting comments to bring your conversation to a satisfying close.
- Check in with each other about confidentiality.
- Think about what you'd like to bring back to the full group. (Note: there's no need for consensus. Individuals, not groups, will be invited to offer reflections.)

**IV. Reflections in the Full Group**

- What was it like to talk about the issue in this manner?
- Is there an idea or promising question that you are taking with you?



# Appendix M

## Facilitation Challenges: Prevention and Response

### TAKE A PREVENTIVE APPROACH

- Before and between sessions, collaborate with participants in order to foster shared responsibility for the conversation and to build understanding and trust between yourself and the participants.
- Foster clarity about purpose (and other expectations) so those who attend are very likely to be interested and motivated to do “the work.” Decisions to shift the group’s purposes should be explicit and consensual.
- Ask the group to make explicit agreements about how they want to communicate. If the agreements aren’t supporting the group’s purpose, work with the group to revise them.

### PREPARE PARTICIPANTS TO DEAL WITH CHALLENGES

- Elicit participants’ wisdom about what has worked or not worked in the past when they have wanted to hold a constructive conversation in the face of conflict.
- Give them “self-help tools” for enhanced self-responsibility.

### PREPARE YOURSELF TO DEAL WITH CHALLENGES

- Understand the “old conversation”: repeating patterns and stuck places; what to avoid or support; buzz words and problematic language.
- Develop your emotional readiness to facilitate a conversation which may be challenging to you as well as to participants.

### WHEN YOU CONSIDER ANY INTERVENTION, AIM TO:

*BE LEGITIMATE.* Keep in mind that your authority is rooted in: the agreements; the articulated purpose of the whole endeavor (and/or one segment); and an acceptance by the group of your role.

*BE COMPASSIONATE AND POSITIVE.* Be positive and avoid shaming judgments; assume good intentions; suggest alternatives when there is an infraction; note what seems helpful or understandable. For example, if someone is taking a lot of airtime, you might ask if those who have not spoken would like a chance to speak. Or, if someone speaks in generalities about the experience of others, you might ask, “How did you personally experience that?”

*MATCH FLEXIBILITY WITH GROUP DEVELOPMENT.* At the outset, intervene with greater strictness to avoid setting a precedent for laxness about the agreements; over time, your intuitions may tell you to be a bit more flexible, but always attend to the well being of the group and its members, and support its progress toward achieving its purposes.

*BE CURIOUS AND TRANSPARENT.* Remember that you may not understand what is happening—ask rather than assume. Also, remember that the group is a resource for addressing dilemmas. You don’t need to have answers to group process dilemmas. You can serve the group by sharing dilemmas and asking for input. This puts less pressure on you and enhances group ownership of their conversation.

# Appendix N

## Dialogue in the Jewish Tradition

By Mitch Chanin, Mira Colflesh, Dr. Saundra Sterling Epstein, and  
Rabbi Rachel Schoenfeld for the Jewish Dialogue Group\*

### I. Introduction

*In the course of a discussion about the origin of the afternoon prayer, the Talmud refers to Isaac who “went out to meditate in the field toward evening” and concludes that “meditate” must mean “to pray.” However, the Talmudic statement, “ein sichah ela tefillah,” can also mean “conversation is a form of prayer.” That is a startling and powerful idea. A genuine encounter with a human other can be a prelude to an encounter with the Divine Other. The disciplines required are the same: to be open, to listen as well as speak, to be capable of empathy and humility, to honour the other by an act of focused attention. Nor is this a minor matter. The greatest command of all, Shema Yisrael, literally means “Listen, O Israel.”*

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, Chief Rabbi of the UK, [www.chief Rabbi.org/articles/other/jc.html](http://www.chief Rabbi.org/articles/other/jc.html)

The Jewish tradition teaches that dialogue is a sacred activity. There are many rich teachings about dialogue and respectful communication to be found in Jewish texts, such as the concepts of “controversy for the sake of heaven” and “guarding the tongue.” We have found that in some communities, it is useful to describe the conversations that we facilitate as a sacred endeavor or to explain the purpose and structure of the dialogue in terms of Jewish teachings.

When participants see the conversation in which they are engaged as a sacred activity, with a spiritual as well as practical purpose, it may be easier for them to be open to others. It will also help them to be patient and careful in the way that they speak. Each step of the dialogue becomes more significant, and the process itself becomes more meaningful. In addition, participants may find the structure of the dialogue less constraining and more useful when they see that it has parallels in some of Judaism’s most important teachings. Some of the communication agreements that we recommend, for example, are similar in significant ways to Jewish guidelines for avoiding harmful speech. Finally, speaking about the dialogue in religious terms can help people to experience their conversation as the newest link in a long chain of dialogues stretching back thousands of years. The participants’ work as members of a dialogue group is rooted firmly in tradition and will help to shape the future of Judaism.

We have compiled a number of Jewish texts that call on people to engage in dialogue, avoid harmful speech, and listen carefully. We have also put together some ideas about how to bring Jewish texts and traditions into your dialogues. This appendix includes:

1. a brief list of some of the ways that you can make use of Jewish teachings as a facilitator
2. a compilation of quotes from the Bible, Talmud, Midrash, and more recent sources
3. interpretation of some of these texts
4. blessings and songs that participants can recite and sing when beginning or ending a dialogue

\* Several other people contributed their ideas, reviewed drafts, and helped with editing. Thanks very much to Joseph Berman, Rabbi Benjamin Hecht, Maggie Herzig, Karen Kohn, Rabbi Nancy Fuchs-Kreimer, Susan Landau, Beth Perry, Debra Rappaport, and Jim Rosenstein.

## CONSTRUCTIVE CONVERSATIONS ABOUT THE ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN CONFLICT

We encourage you to use these materials in any way that will be helpful for your community. You may wish to read the whole appendix closely or else just to skim through it and use it as reference. You need not master all of the ideas here in order to bring these materials into your dialogue. We have tried to make this document as comprehensive as possible, and we hope it is not overwhelming.

If you make use of any of these ideas, please let us know how it goes. Also, please share with us your own ideas for bringing Jewish teachings into dialogue programs. We hope to incorporate your feedback into future editions of this appendix. Please also feel free to contact us with any questions. Email [info@jewishdialogue.org](mailto:info@jewishdialogue.org) or write to us at: Jewish Dialogue Group, PO Box 34726, Philadelphia, PA 19101.

## II. How to Bring Jewish Teachings and Traditions into the Dialogue Process

There are several ways to bring Jewish traditions and teachings into your dialogues:

**A. Speak about the various ways that Jewish traditions value dialogue, listening, and respectful communication, using the texts and explanations presented here.** Refer to these teachings in your introductory comments or in publicity materials. You can also introduce them at other points during the dialogue. A few examples:

- In your introduction, when you explain the purpose of dialogue, you may want to mention Martin Buber's assertion that "all real living is meeting."
- In another situation, you might want to briefly tell the story of the "controversy for the sake of heaven" between Hillel and Shammai, and say that dialogue offers people a way to bring that spirit into conversations about contentious issues.
- When you explain the communication agreements, it might be useful to refer to the teachings about "guarding the tongue" or the adage "Let the honor of your neighbor be as dear to you as your own." Then explain that participants often find the agreements and the structure of the dialogue helpful in maintaining the spirit of these teachings.

**B. Hold a text study that encourages congregants to explore some of these teachings.** A list of questions for use in study sessions appears in Section IV. You may want to:

- Hold a brief discussion about one or more of the texts before beginning a dialogue series.
- Have participants read one or more of the texts cited in this appendix at the beginning of the dialogue session, and ask them to share their reactions in the first go-round.
- Set aside one of the meetings in a dialogue series for a full-length text study, rather than a regular session. Use whatever approach will make the group comfortable. It may work best to split people into pairs (*hevruta*) or groups of three to discuss the texts.

**C. Begin a dialogue session with a moment of silence or a *niggun*, a wordless melody, as way to create a "sacred space."**

**D. When beginning a new dialogue program, invite the participants to recite the *Shehekienu*, the traditional blessing that people say to express joy and gratitude when they see or experience something for the first time.**

**E. Close the dialogue with a song that expresses hope and gratitude, such as *Hinay Ma Tov* or *Oseh Shalom*.** You can ask the participants to suggest a song or suggest one yourself. Be careful to choose a song that people of all religious and political perspectives will appreciate.

*A note of caution:* Before deciding how or if to use these ideas in a particular dialogue program, learn as much as you can about the participants' needs and interests. Not everyone will be comfortable with traditional texts or religious rituals; secular Jews in particular may find God language alienating. Some people may simply feel confused or excluded by specific references that they don't understand. These texts and ideas can add a great deal to the dialogue, but be careful to use them in a way that is appropriate for the group.

### III. Jewish Texts That Support the Practice of Dialogue

#### A. Controversy for the Sake of Heaven

A controversy for Heaven's sake will have lasting value, but a controversy not for heaven's sake will not endure. What is an example of a controversy for Heaven's sake? The debates of Hillel and Shammai. What is an example of a controversy not for Heaven's sake? The rebellion of Korach and his associates [Numbers 16:1-3].

*Pirkei Avot 5:17 (2nd Century CE)*

For three years there was a dispute between the School of Shammai and the School of Hillel, the former asserting, "The law is in agreement with our views," and the latter contending, "The law is in agreement with our views." Then a voice from heaven announced, "these and those both are the words of the living God but the law is in agreement with the rulings of the School of Hillel."

Since, however, "both are the words of the living God," what was it that entitled the School of Hillel to have the law fixed according to their rulings? Because they were kindly and modest, they taught their own rulings as well as those of the School of Shammai, and even more, they taught the rulings of the School of Shammai before their own. This should teach you that one who humbles oneself is exalted by the Holy One and one who exalts oneself is humbled by the Holy One.

*Babylonian Talmud, Eruvin, 13b (7th Century CE)*

Why do we record the non-accepted opinions of the schools of Hillel and Shammai? To teach future generations that one need not demand that only one's own way is correct, for our forebears did not do so. Why then do we record the minority opinion of one as opposed to the majority opinion of all the rest, given that the majority decides? So that a future court might have reference to them, and rule thereby.

*Mishna, Eduyot I: 4-5 (2nd Century CE)*

Even father and son, master and disciple, who study Torah at the same gate become enemies of each other; yet they do not stir from there until they come to love each other.

*Babylonian Talmud, Kiddushin 30b (7th Century CE)*

Controversy has the quality of creating the world. For the beginning of creation was by means of the vacant space, since otherwise all would be Infinity and there would be no room for creating the world. Therefore He withdrew the light to two sides, providing the vacant space, within which He created all that was created through words.

The same applies to controversies. For if all the sages were of one mind, there would be no room for creating the world. It is only by virtue of their controversies, each taking himself to one side, that a quality of vacant space is provided between them. . . .

For all the words each of them speaks are all for the sake of creating the world, which they effect within the vacant spaces between them. For the sages create everything through their words . . . but they must be careful not to speak too much.

*Rabbi Nachman of Breslov, Likutei Moharan (early 19th Century CE)*

## Interpretation of the Texts

The Jewish tradition calls upon people to participate in the collective work of making sense of the world both by contributing their ideas and judgments and by listening openly and carefully to the ideas of others. Seeking truth is a sacred task, and one needs to listen as well as speak in order to pursue that task in the fullest way possible. No one can know the entire truth, and the mark of a wise person is that he or she values and understands alternative views. Jewish traditions call on us to offer our ideas with passion and conviction, but always to recognize our limitations and to seek understanding of other views.

One of the most important texts in the entire Jewish tradition, the Talmud, represents a collective effort by several generations of Rabbis to interpret the Torah—to understand the traditions, to determine how to act in the world, and to examine ethical, moral, and political questions through the framework of the Torah. The idea that certain kinds of controversy can be positive is integral to the Talmud. While the discussions and arguments that are recorded in the Talmud are not “dialogues” in the exact way that we use that word now, they still embody many of the same values that the modern idea of dialogue holds. They represent a very specific kind of controversy—controversy in which people seek truth collectively and try to find ways to live together, rather than seeking simply to win; controversy in which each person listens to the other in order to understand, and not merely to refute.

The Talmud provides a model for positive controversy and a number of lessons about how to conduct it. Some of the lessons we can derive from the Talmud are:

- Pay attention to both majority and minority opinions.
- Listen carefully to other perspectives.
- Recognize that in dealing with ethical matters, no one person possesses the whole truth. Seek truth collectively.
- Assert your perspective, but always be humble and open. Listen carefully to other perspectives. Learn from them and let them influence your own.
- Share your uncertainties and questions as well as your conclusions.
- Positive controversy seeks a way to live together ethically, not just to win.
- Don't be afraid to explore your disagreements, even if it is painful.
- Be willing to share and examine the assumptions behind your conclusions.
- Posing good questions is as important as proposing answers.
- Engage with people whose perspectives seem totally different from your own as well as people who appear to share your basic assumptions.

These guidelines for dealing with controversy are articulated in many different places in the Talmud. Below, we will concentrate on three of the most telling of these Talmudic texts:

1. “Controversy for Heaven’s Sake”
2. “These and these are both the words of the living God.”
3. “Why do we record the minority opinion?”

In part four, we will consider how the Talmud addresses the question of how we should respond to perspectives that seem opposed to our own in ways that are dangerous or threatening. We will address this question through two quotes.

Finally, in part five, we will examine the role that asking questions plays in the Talmud and in the Jewish tradition as a whole. The conversations that are found in the Talmud begin with questions rather than assertions. Asking good questions is an essential part of “controversy for the sake of heaven” and an essential part of dialogue.

### **1. Controversy for Heaven’s Sake**

*A controversy for Heaven’s sake will have lasting value, but a controversy not for heaven’s sake will not endure. What is an example of a controversy for Heaven’s sake? The debates of Hillel and Shammai. What is an example of a controversy not for Heaven’s sake? The rebellion of Korach and his associates. (Pirkei Avot 5:17)*

This text is explicit that controversy produces results that are of value, when it is motivated by a desire for real communication. Throughout the Talmud, Hillel and Shammai are presented as antagonists in issues of Jewish law. If Hillel says one thing, Shammai says another. Why is there all this controversy? Why does this sacred text not simply tell us what to believe, but instead record two different opinions on almost everything? The text states that the controversy itself is of value. The search for truth-and the dialogues, arguments, and debates that we undertake together as part of that search-is itself the point. When people explore their disagreements and compare their different perspectives, they come closer to the truth. As such, any controversy that is motivated by the search for truth is a sacred act.

The Talmud recognizes that disagreement can be painful, but explains that when it takes place as part of a sacred controversy, it produces good results. While sacred controversy may at first push people apart, it draws them back together in the end if they see the process through: “Even father and son, master and disciple, who study Torah at the same gate become enemies of each other; yet they do not stir from there until they come to love each other.” (Babylonian Talmud, Kiddushin 30b)

The Rabbis contrast this controversy for the sake of heaven with the manipulative use of argument to pursue personal gain, as in the story of Korach. Korach is a figure in the book of Numbers who challenges the authority of Moses and Aaron and initiates a rebellion. When Moses calls on Korach and his followers to sit down and talk with him, they refuse, replying simply, “We will not go up.” The text depicts Korach as a self-interested demagogue, and his challenge as the paradigm of useless, destructive controversy. Some say that Korach’s primary transgression was in his utter refusal to dialogue. He uses polemical language to split the community and to gain power for himself. He does not engage in a substantive conversation about the needs and interests of the community or about how it should be led, and he refuses explicitly to meet with his opponents.

### **2. These and These are Both the Words of the Living God**

*For three years there was a dispute between School of Shammai and the School of Hillel, the former asserting, “The law is in agreement with our views,” and the latter contending, “The law is in agreement with our views.” Then a voice from heaven announced, “these and those both are the words of the living God, but the law is in agreement with the rulings of the School of Hillel.”*

*Since, however, “both are the words of the living God,” what was it that entitled the School of Hillel to have the law fixed according to their rulings? Because they were kindly and modest, they taught their own rulings as well as those of the School of Shammai, and even more, they taught the rulings of the School of Shammai before their own. This should teach you that one who humbles oneself is exalted by the Holy One and one who exalts oneself is humbled by the*

*Holy One.* (Babylonian Talmud, Eruvin, 13b)

This text says something radical that may surprise: on the topic of many debates, God does not have a preference. In the context of the Talmud, this means that on a theoretical level, there is not necessarily a “right” and a “wrong” to most debates. Perhaps this sentence could be translated in a secular voice to read “both these perspectives and these perspectives are equal ethically.” Two different opinions can both, in theory, be right! However, this is not the end of this text. This text goes on to say, “The law is in agreement with the rulings of the School of Hillel.” In the world of the Talmud, even though multiple opinions of law could be right in theory, in practice, one law was thought needed for a society to live by.

In situations of controversy today, we often find that each person has truth on his or her side, but that in order to live together, we need to make certain agreements and decide our communal rules. If we bring the tradition of Controversy for the Sake of Heaven into our own lives, we see that the decisions and arrangements we reach together should reflect the part of the truth that each person holds. Dialogue gives us a way to make sure that each person understands the piece of truth that each other person holds.

The Talmud explains further, “What was it that entitled the School of Hillel to have the law fixed according to their rulings? Because they were kindly and modest, they taught their own rulings as well as those of the School of Shammai, and even more, they taught the rulings of the School of Shammai before their own.”

Commentators have offered many different interpretations of this passage. Rabbi Benjamin Hecht, a contemporary commentator in Toronto offers a beautiful interpretation of this passage that may be especially useful for people engaged in dialogue:

*We are called upon by G-d to enter the realm of Divine thought and to voice our convictions, our thoughts and ideas. Yet, simultaneously, as we recognize this supreme faith that G-d has placed in us, we are also called upon to recognize our own limitations . . . .*

*T.B. Eruvin 13b states that the reason the law was codified according to Beit Hillel was because they, in their expression of Torah, always quoted Beit Shammai first. In that simple act, Bet Hillel declared this very concept and, so, established their prominence for the generations. Their recognition of their own human limit did not prevent them from defending their view, for so Torah also demands. Yet, by quoting Beit Shammai first, Beit Hillel understood their full place within Torah. Another's opinion must be heard, recognized and respected-not just as an act of tolerance-for this very process of hearing, recognizing and respecting powerfully changes the actual nature of one's opinion and one's Torah. Lfi aniyat da'ati [according to the poverty of my thought]-this is what I think but I know of variant thought and it all lies within the realm of Torah; thus, a recognition of the awesomeness of Torah, of the Divine Wisdom, is born-and affects what I think. One who is certain that his opinion is absolutely correct and represents the entire allowed spectrum of Torah, ultimately establishes his opinion as outside the realm of Torah for the parameters of this person's Torah are those solely of man; he cannot touch the Divine that extends beyond him. (www.nishma.org/articles/insight/spark5756-5.html)*

No one person can fully comprehend the Torah or have sole possession of the truth, but we can each contribute to humanity's collective understanding by speaking and listening carefully. We can contribute in an especially useful way by paying close attention to alternative perspectives and learning from them as we formulate our conclusions. (Many people consider the type of humility that Rabbi Hecht describes, *anava*, to be a key Jewish value.) The same might be said about the scientific method, or about the use of dialogue to talk through controversial issues. Each of these endeavors calls us on speak boldly, but also to listen and remain open and humble.



### 3. Why then do we record the minority opinion?

*Why do we record the non-accepted opinions of the schools of Hillel and Shammai? To teach future generations that one need not demand that only one's own way is correct, for our forebears did not do so. Why then do we record the minority opinion of one as opposed to the majority opinion of all the rest, given that the majority decides? So that a future court might have reference to them, and rule thereby. (Mishna, Eduyot I: 4-5)*

The Talmud records the Rabbis' conversations and debates about a wide range of questions and, at every point, it describes both the majority and the minority opinion. The basic structure of the text embodies a respect for diversity of views and open discussion.

This text offers two reasons for recording dissenting views: The Rabbis of the Talmudic era recognized that even though a particular argument did not win majority support, it might still be very important, and they wanted future generations to be able to draw on the wisdom that minority perspectives contained. They expected that rabbinical courts in the future would consider the reasoning and the ideas that are found in dissenting opinions when issuing rulings of their own. Future generations would study majority and minority opinions with equal attention.

In addition, the Rabbis wanted to show future generations how important it was to be open to alternative perspectives and open to changing one's own mind. By recording both majority and minority opinions, they were showing future generations that "one need not demand that only one's own way is correct." By constructing the Talmud in this way, they provided an example of open-mindedness for future generations to follow.

### 4. Talking With "The Other"

The Talmudic concept of "controversy for the sake of heaven" provides us with some useful guidelines for conducting dialogue about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and other issues, but it also raises some important questions: Who should be part of the conversation? How should we relate to people whose perspectives seem dangerous or threatening to us? When should we listen to and talk with someone, and when should we avoid them?

A number of contemporary commentators point out that the conversations recorded in the Talmud represent a particular subset of Jewish thinkers of the period, namely the Rabbis—those leaders who had membership in the academy and who fit into the emerging Orthodoxy. With a few exceptions, no one else was considered to be a legitimate interpreter of the Torah or included in making decisions about Jewish law. The Talmud largely excludes the voices of women and commoners, and it rejects the views of people who were deemed to be heretics. There are many passages that tell us explicitly to ignore and even to stamp out the words of heretics, depicting these outside perspectives as threatening the integrity of the tradition. One such passage argues:

*The writings of the heretics deserve to be burned, even though the holy name of God occurs therein, for paganism is less dangerous than heresy; the former fails to recognize the truth of Judaism from want of knowledge, but the latter denies what it fully knows. (Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat, 116a)*

The Talmudic story of Rabbi Meir and Elisha ben Abuya presents an alternative perspective on this issue, however. Elisha ben Abuya represents the archetypal figure of the unbeliever in the Talmud. Once a great Rabbi, he loses his faith and becomes an atheist and an exponent of Greek philosophy. He is ejected from the rabbinate and officially shunned. The Talmud often refers to him simply as "The Other," Acher. Nevertheless, he remains engaged with the Jewish community, and the Talmud depicts a tender

relationship between him and Rabbi Meir, one of the most important sages and legal authorities in the entire text. Rabbi Meir was Rabbi Elisha's student in his youth, and he continues to study with Elisha after he becomes an apostate. Rabbi Meir tries to convince Elisha to repent, but he also continues to learn from him, as we see in the following passage:

*The rabbis taught: It happened that The Other was riding upon his horse on the Sabbath, Rabbi Meir was walking behind him to learn the Law from his mouth. He said to him: Meir, turn backwards, for I have already measured by means of my horse's hoofs up to this point the legal limit of traveling on the Sabbath. He [Meir] answered him: You should also return. He [The Other] said to him: And have I not already answered you what I have heard from behind the curtain? [Elisha had been signaled by God that he could not repent, and therefore it would not matter if he returned or continued riding.]* (Babylonian Talmud, Hagigah, 14b-15b)

Rabbi Meir even brings Elisha ben Abuya to teach his students. Although Elisha is excluded from decision-making, Rabbi Meir still respects and listens to him and considers his views important to understand. Although their conversations include a great deal of debate and attempts to convince, they are also characterized by mutual care, genuine respect, and listening.

The story of Rabbi Meir and Elisha ben Abuya exemplifies two important elements of dialogue: First, it is possible, and useful, to engage in dialogue with people who disagree with us in fundamental ways. In fact, when we are tempted to think of someone as "The Other," it may be especially important to engage that person in dialogue. Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, the Chief Rabbi of Great Britain and a constant advocate of dialogue, argues in his book *The Dignity of Difference* that "we must learn the art of conversation, from which truth emerges . . . by the process of letting our world be enlarged by the presence of others who think, act, and interpret reality in ways radically different from our own." (p. 23)

Second: dialogue is a separate process from decision-making. When we engage in dialogue, our immediate purpose is not to reach agreement or solutions, although we may find through dialogue that those goals are feasible. Our immediate goal is simply to learn about the other person, to help him or her to learn about us, and reflect on our own ideas, questions, and dilemmas. In this story, the differences between Rabbi Meir and Elisha ben Abuya are so great that they cannot fully share the same community, cannot live according to the same guidelines. Compromise seems impossible. Nevertheless, they find useful ways to talk with each other, and both gain from their dialogue.

## 5. Asking Questions

*[During the Passover Seder] they pour the second cup of wine, and here the child asks the father. But if the child lacks knowledge, the father teaches him: "How different this night is from all other nights!"* (Mishna Pesachim, 10:4)

"Controversy for the sake of heaven" requires people to ask good questions as well as offering and listening to ideas. The practice of asking questions is central to the Jewish tradition, and questions play an important part in many Jewish texts and rituals. Questions are also an essential element of dialogue.

The conversations that are recorded in the Talmud begin with questions, not with assertions. Some commentators argue that the wisdom of the text is found as much in the questions as in the responses. This practice is carried on today. When people study Talmud together using the traditional method, they pose questions to one another as a way to explore the text from a variety of different angles. In Hebrew, a Torah scholar is known as a "Talmid Chacham," a wise student, a questioner, someone who is dedicated to asking and learning, not simply as a "Chacham," or a wise person.

The commentaries on the Torah known as “Midrash” generally begin with questions as well. Jewish thinkers over the centuries have created a vast body of stories, parables, homilies, and analyses that respond to a wide range of questions about the text. Just as the Talmud presents multiple views about each question it addresses, the Midrashic literature offers a wide range of responses to the various questions it takes up. These various interpretations both complement and conflict with each other. “Midrash” literally means seeking or inquiry. The process of Midrash continues today as people pose new questions and rethink old questions, writing new Midrashim in each generation.

Translations of the Chumash, the first five books of the Torah, generally list a variety of interpretations of each verse, drawing on the classical Midrashim and other commentaries. They do not rank or attempt to reconcile these interpretations. The multiple questions and answers enrich and complicate each other, and together they invite the reader to question and challenge the text him- or herself.

We are reminded of the importance of asking questions in an especially striking way during the Passover Seder. Children are encouraged to ask questions of the older generation, and the telling of the Passover story does not begin until questions have been posed. Even if someone is celebrating a Seder alone, he or she is required to ask questions. In a recent sermon about the role of questioning in the Jewish tradition, Rabbi Janet Marder notes that the text from the Mishna that is quoted above suggests that it is ideal for children to generate questions of their own during the Seder, rather than simply reciting the familiar questions that are recorded in the Haggadah: “The traditional four questions are only there as a fallback, a substitute, if the child does not generate questions on his or her own.” Rabbi Marder continues:

*Questions are the quintessential Jewish mode of language. The Seder, set up to encourage the asking of questions, is just one example of a cultural system specifically designed to create inquiring minds. . . . The goal is not a one-sided monologue in which content is poured from older vessels into new ones, but lively intergenerational conversation. Through dialogue connections are strengthened; each partner contributes something essential and both come to a better understanding of the other. Finally, questions are a crucial element of the Seder because questions symbolize what it is to be free.* (www.betham.org/sermons/marder040409.html)

Questions play a critical role in dialogue of all kinds, including the structured type of dialogue that we describe in this manual. Facilitators spend a great deal of time crafting or selecting opening questions for the participants, and participants are encouraged to think carefully and creatively about questions they would like to ask one another. The structure of the dialogue makes it safe enough for people to pose questions that they might otherwise be unable to articulate and to answer questions that might otherwise seem threatening. When dialogue participants pose questions, they can learn about each other and explore critical issues in ways that might not be possible without this structure.

## **B. Guarding One's Speech**

Death and life are in the power of the tongue.

*Proverbs 18:21*

Do not go about as a talebearer among your people.

*Leviticus 19:16*

One can speak [and it is] like the piercing of a sword, but the tongue of the wise is a healing.

*Proverbs 12:18*

You shall not wrong one another, but you shall fear your God, for I am the Lord your God.

*Leviticus 25:17*

This verse prohibits committing a verbal wrong, that one should not needlessly hurt his fellow, nor give him inappropriate advice that is self-serving to the advisor.

*Rashi's commentary on Leviticus 25:17 (11th Century CE)*

Whoever shames his neighbor in front of others, is like one who sheds blood.

*Babylonian Talmud, Baba Metzia 58b (7th Century CE)*

Therefore, you must not say: "Since I have been put to shame, so I will put others to shame." Rabbi Tanhuma said: "If you do so, know Whom you put to shame [as the verse states]: 'In the likeness of God, He made him [the first Adam]' (Genesis 5:1)"

*Genesis Rabbah 24:7 (6th Century CE)*

One who rebukes his friend-whether concerning matters that are between them, or whether concerning matters between him and God-must do so in private, speaking to him calmly and with soft speech.

*Maimonides, Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Deot 6:7 (12th Century CE)*

Just as one is commanded to say that which will be heeded, so is one commanded not to say that which will not be heeded. Rabbi Abba said: It is an obligation [not to rebuke]. As it is said: "Do not rebuke a scorner, lest he hate you; rebuke a wise person and he will love you." [Proverbs 9:8]

*Babylonian Talmud, Yevamot 65b (7th Century CE)*

A person's tongue is more powerful than one's sword. A sword can kill someone who is nearby; a tongue can cause the death of someone who is far away.

*Babylonian Talmud, Arachin 15b (7th Century CE)*

Evil speech [*Lashon Hara*] kills three people: the speaker, the listener, and the subject.

*Pirkei Avot 2:1 (2nd Century CE)*

Rabbi Eliezer said: “Let the honor of your neighbor be as dear to you as your own. Be not easily moved to anger.”

*Pirkei Avot 2:15 (2nd Century CE)*

Ben Zoma said, “Who is honored? One who honors all God’s creatures.”

*Pirkei Avot 4:1 (2nd Century CE)*

But the stranger that lives with you shall be to you as one born among you, and you shall love him as yourself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.

*Leviticus 19:33*

Don’t separate yourself from the community, don’t be sure of yourself until the day you die, don’t judge another man until you are in his position, don’t say anything that cannot be readily understood in the hope that eventually it will be understood. . . .

*Pirkei Avot 2:5 (2nd Century CE)*

Judge every person with extra merit in their favor.

*Pirkei Avot 1:6 (2nd Century CE)*

If you see a person who speaks well of their companion, know that the ministering angels also speak of this person’s merit before the Holy Blessed One.

*Midrash Mishle (date uncertain: mostly likely compiled between 8th and 11th Century)*

The world exists only for the sake of people who, in the midst of disputes, suppress their instincts.

*Babylonian Talmud, Hullin 89a (7th Century CE)*

One who is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and one who rules his spirit than one who takes a city.

*Proverbs, 16:32*

Rabbi Joshua ben Levi said: “A procession of angels pass before each person, and the heralds go before them, saying, ‘Make way for the image of God!’”

*Midrash, Deuteronomy Rabbah, 4:4 (10th Century CE)*

Teach your tongue to say, “I do not know,” lest you be led to lie.

*Babylonian Talmud, Berakhot 4a (7th Century CE)*

## Interpretation of the Texts

Because speech has great power, our tradition includes a category of ethics labeled *Shmirat HaLashon*. This concept can be translated as “guarding the tongue” or “awareness of what you say.” Under its heading is also *Lashon Hara*—the concept of being careful of negative speech (the “evil tongue”), especially gossip about others. In many of the above texts, words even hold the power of life and death. Traditionally, verbal wrongs done to one another have been given greater weight than any other harm. The “*Al Chet*” confession that is recited on Yom Kippur enumerates forty-three different sins; of those, eleven are sins committed through speech. This section elaborates on several aspects of Jewish speech ethics and related teachings that are especially relevant to people engaged in dialogue.

Central to Jewish speech ethics is the idea that what we say has consequences and that it is not always possible to revoke what has already been said. To defame someone or to shame him is considered a grievous harm, which cannot be easily rectified. In debate, many people use speech in these ways. Dialogue offers us the opportunity to use our words for good—to draw closer to one another instead of dividing us. Several of the general guidelines that we can adopt from the concept of “Guarding the Tongue” are:

- Be careful not to cause harm to others through words, including both people to whom you speak and those about whom you speak.
- Be careful not to cause harm to yourself through words.
- Speech is very powerful—use it wisely and carefully.
- Be aware of the positive impact of words.

We examine a few key concepts in more detail below:

1. Treat everyone with respect and compassion.
2. Be careful when expressing disagreement or distress.
3. Ask questions rather than making negative assumptions.
4. Do not exaggerate what you know.
5. Here we offer some suggestions about ways to put these ideas into practice, even when it seems difficult.

### 1. Treat Everyone with Respect and Compassion

The Jewish tradition includes a number of teachings about the importance of honoring each person: “Let the honor of your neighbor be as dear to you as your own.” (Pirke Avot 2:15) In all of our actions, including our speech, we should pay as much attention to other people’s honor as to our own. One of the key values in Jewish tradition, *kavod ha’briyot*, “the dignity of created beings,” reminds us that each human life is worthy of care at all times. Each person is created in the image of God, *b’tzelem elohim*, and we should avoid causing anyone to experience unnecessary suffering. Throughout Jewish texts we are called upon to respect and honor those who are different from us, as well as those who are similar. The Torah calls on us on thirty-six different occasions to “love the stranger.” This mitzvah is mentioned more frequently than any other.

The texts call upon us not merely to avoid harming people, but to practice *chesed*, kindness and compassion. A well-known quote from the Talmud reminds us:

*Consider the Torah! There is a deed of loving-kindness at its beginning and a deed of loving-kindness at its end. Loving-kindness at its beginning: "The Lord God made for Adam and his wife garments of skins and clothed them." [Genesis 3:21]. Loving-kindness at its end: "And He buried [Moses] in the valley" [Deuteronomy 34:6] (Babylonian Talmud, Sota 14a)*

The most well-known codification of Jewish speech ethics is found in the 1873 book *Sefer Chafetz Chaim*, by Polish rabbi Israel Meir HaCohen Kagan. This text details a number of guidelines about what can be said and not said in a wide variety of situations. It calls on us to avoid talking about other people in any way that will be derogatory or damaging to anyone, physically, financially, socially, or by inducing stress. It also tells us to avoid talking about others in a way that generates animosity between people.

In structured dialogue, the participants generally agree to "speak for ourselves and our own experience," and to avoid representing the views of others, either other participants or people not present in the conversation. Some groups adopt a strict interpretation of the prohibition on *Lashon HaRa* and agree to avoid talking about anyone who is not present during the dialogue session, while other groups simply agree to extend the same respect to people outside of the room that they have promised to one another. Dialogue groups generally also commit to "confidentiality," agreeing not to share any participant's comments with people outside the group.

## **2. Be Careful When Expressing Disagreement or Distress**

According to Jewish tradition, we should be especially careful to treat people with respect and gentleness when we criticize something they have done. Further, we have an obligation to rebuke other people in such a way that we will be heard. There are a number of teachings that point out that if we know someone will not be able to learn from a criticism that we want to offer, and that our words will only cause hurt or anger, it is better not to criticize.

Commenting on verse from Proverbs (9:8), "Do not rebuke a scorner, lest he hate you; rebuke a wise person and he will love you," Rabbi Ela in the Talmud says that: "[j]ust as one is commanded to say that which will be heeded, so is one commanded not to say that which will not be heeded." (Babylonian Talmud, Yevamot 65b) This directive can be understood in two ways. Some commentators read the text to mean that we should not criticize someone if he or she is not open to hearing our criticism. Other commentators point out that the text can tell us how to offer criticism, not simply when to offer it. When we offer criticism, we should treat people as though they are wise, and not as though they are scoffers or fools:

*When giving rebuke, don't just point out faults, thereby making the person feel like a [scoffer]. Also emphasize the positive qualities, make the person feel like a [wise person], and he will accept your rebuke and love you. (Rabbi Yisroel Ciner, [www.torah.org/learning/parsha-insights/5758/achareimos.html](http://www.torah.org/learning/parsha-insights/5758/achareimos.html))*

In structured dialogue, participants agree not to criticize one another's views, but simply to state when they disagree with something or when something disturbs them. This guideline is somewhat different from the guidelines found in Jewish texts, but it reflects many of the same values and has many of the same effects.

### 3. Ask Questions Rather Than Making Negative Assumptions

Jewish tradition also teaches that we should be careful not to prejudge people, especially not to assume that they are motivated by negative intentions. In fact, we are called upon to “judge every person with extra merit in their favor,” to give people the benefit of the doubt and to look for what is understandable about their actions. This teaching has direct relevance to dialogue. In dialogue sessions, facilitators sometimes remind the participants: “It can be especially useful to ask a question when someone has said something that disturbed you and when you find yourself making assumptions about that person. Rather than simply reacting, ask that person a question so that you can understand their ideas, feelings, motivations, or experience better.” This practice requires us to suspend negative judgments and to assume that there is something worth understanding in each person.

### 4. Do Not Exaggerate What You Know

The Talmud reminds us to guard against speech that exaggerates our knowledge: “Teach your tongue to say, “I do not know,” lest you be led to lie.” (Babylonian Talmud, Berakhot 4a) The temptation to overstate what we know can be very strong. When we are in conflict with someone, we may be tempted to express undue certainty about a particular issue so that we can win an argument. At other times, we may find ourselves claiming more knowledge or more certainty than we really possess in order to impress someone or convince them to act in a way that serves our interests. In some cases, exaggerating what we know may simply be a way to shore up our own sense of identity or security. When we cannot or do not admit to uncertainty, we sometimes end up lying, often without even realizing that we are doing so. Our words may mislead people in ways that are very harmful.

It can be very difficult to hold back from claiming more knowledge than we have. The text directs us not merely to avoid exaggeration, but also to say explicitly when we do not know something, thereby counteracting this tendency with a deliberate, positive action.

### 5. Putting These Ideas into Practice

The Jewish tradition recognizes the commitment and effort involved in living according to these values, and provides several teachings that can help people to do so:

First, there are a number of teachings about the importance of self-awareness and self-restraint. In the midst of dispute, we should remember to suppress some of our instincts. At every moment, each of us is pulled simultaneously towards both constructive and hurtful actions. The impulse to strike back at another person or to try to convince them just makes us human. Paying close attention to the feelings that arise in us as we talk with someone allows us to deliberately choose the feelings we want to act upon.

Second, in order to honor someone, we need to listen carefully to that person. The act of listening itself demonstrates respect and care. Furthermore, when we listen to other people, we can learn about their needs, ideas, and concerns, and then take those things into account in all of our actions. Listening to people enables us to discover the proper way to speak to them. Without listening, we will not know how to guard our tongues. The discussion of the *Shema* in the next session describes more about this concept.

Third, external standards of behavior can help guide our actions, since it can be hard to know in the moment what would be best. Jewish law sets forth a detailed set of rules about what we can say and what we must not say in a variety of different circumstances. Traditional Jews often accept all of these rules as binding, while some Jews simply look to them for guidance. In dialogue, we suggest a simpler set of guidelines. Some of these guidelines closely parallel rules about communication that are found in Jewish



law, while others are quite different.

Finally, it is important to remind ourselves that the person we are talking with is worthy of absolute respect. When we disagree fundamentally with someone, a short meditation or silent prayer may help to generate a sense of respect for that person. In a recent Yom Kippur sermon, Rabbi Elliot Strom recommended to his congregation that they call to mind a beautiful image from a commentary on *Pirkei Avot* when they engage in difficult conversations:

*My friends, there is a beautiful Hasidic teaching that before every human being comes a retinue of angels, announcing: "Make way for the image of the Holy One Blessed be He. Make way for the image of God." [Midrash, Deuteronomy Rabbah, 4:4] It's easy to remember this teaching when we look into the eyes of a newborn baby. It's harder-ininitely harder-to keep in mind when in the middle of angry debate. But that is exactly why it is so very necessary. Because, in the end, we can argue and disagree, but ultimately, we must never forget that every human being-even those who oppose us and oppose us fiercely-are children of a loving God just like us.*  
([www.shiraminow.org/clergy\\_2004\\_09\\_24\\_2.htm](http://www.shiraminow.org/clergy_2004_09_24_2.htm))

### C. Listening and Dialogue

Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our God the Lord is One.

*Deuteronomy 6:4*

The Eternal God has taught me how to speak, even to those tired of speech. Morning by morning God awakens me, awakens my ear: teaching me to listen.

*Isaiah 50:4*

To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven . . . a time to keep silent and a time to speak.

*Ecclesiastes 3:1 - 3.7*

Ben Zoma said, "Who is wise? The one who learns from everyone, as it is said [in Psalms 119:99]: 'From all who would teach me, I have gained understanding.'"

*Pirkei Avot 4:1 (2nd Century CE)*

Ben Azzai taught: Do not disdain any person, do not underrate the importance of anything, for there is no person who does not have their hour and there is nothing without a function.

*Pirkei Avot 4:3 (2nd Century CE)*

Torah is acquired by means of 48 qualities [some of] which are attentive listening, articulate speech, intuitive understanding . . . deliberation . . . asking and answering, listening and contributing to the discussion. . . .

*Pirkei Avot 6:6 (2nd Century CE)*

Happy is the generation in which the leaders listen to their followers . . . .

*Babylonian Talmud, Rosh Hashana 25a (7th Century CE)*

The primary word I-Thou can be spoken only with the whole being. Concentration and fusion into the whole being can never take place through my agency, nor can it ever take place without me. I become through my relation to the *Thou*; as I become I, I say *Thou*. All real living is meeting.

*Martin Buber, I and Thou (1923 CE)*

Only he who himself turns to the other human being and opens himself to him receives the world in him. Only the being whose otherness, accepted in my being, lives and faces me in the whole compression of existence brings the radiance of eternity to me. Only when two say to one another with all that they are "It is Thou," is the indwelling of the Present Being between them.

*Martin Buber, Between Man and Man, p. 30 (1947 CE)*

## Interpretation of the Texts

Listening and dialogue hold a central place in much of Jewish practice and theology. To experience the sacred and to bring holiness into the world requires that we remain open to the people around us, to the Divine voice, and to everything that we see and hear. The texts listed here describe several different ways that Jewish tradition directs us to listen and to engage in dialogue. We will offer further explanation of four of them:

1. The *Shema*, the central statement in Jewish worship
2. The directive to “learn from everyone” that is found in the Talmud
3. The prophet Isaiah’s statement about learning from God to listen and speak
4. Martin Buber’s declaration that “all real living is meeting”

### 1. The *Shema*

The *Shema*, one of the most important statements in Jewish worship, begins with the command, “Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One.” This text tells us not to simply passively hear, but to listen actively.

To whom are we told to listen? We listen to ourselves, to other people, or to the Divine voice, all saying the same thing: that there is a unity in the world; that we are all tied together at our source. There is an ultimate oneness, to which we all testify. This ultimate unity does not deny the difference in our experience. “Do not be confused by the many voices you hear; remember they all come from the one God” (Pesikta D’Rav Kahuna). Many Jews think of God as a force which is found in each of us; therefore in listening to and showing regard for each other, we are listening to and showing regard for God.

Further, this directive enables us to act in way that brings sacredness into the world. Hillel famously says in the Talmud that the entire Torah can be summed up in the commandment “Love your neighbor as yourself.” (Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 31a) Rabbi Jeffrey Summit, Executive Director of the Tufts University Hillel, points out that the directive to listen gives us a practical, specific way to carry out this difficult commandment:

*Listening is a prerequisite for love, which is why, I think, the Shema is followed by the words, “and you shall love/V’ahavta.” First listen, then you build the connections that enable you to love. While the text . . . goes on to talk about loving God, the rabbis were much more interested in how you loved other people. Now, the rabbis weren’t naïve. They recognized that you can’t command emotion and you certainly can’t love every person you meet. So they translated love into action: Be exquisitely sensitive to the other human beings around you, their physical needs, their feelings, the quality of their lives. Be so connected to the people around you that you try to see the world through their eyes, where their happiness becomes your happiness, where you can’t sleep well, if you do nothing, while others go to bed hungry.*  
([www.tuftshillel.org/jl-rab05-celebrating25years.htl.htm](http://www.tuftshillel.org/jl-rab05-celebrating25years.htl.htm))

### 2. Learn From Everyone

The book of Pirkei Avot in the Talmud reminds us, “Who is wise? The one who learns from everyone, as it is said ‘From all who would teach me, I have gained understanding.’” Jewish tradition places a supreme value on study and understanding. While some commentators interpret this to mean only study of

particular texts, others have a more expansive view. All of creation is sacred, and we should learn as much as we can about our world, the people around us, and ourselves. Each person has something to teach us, and we should “not disdain any person” nor “underrate the importance of anything.”

Together with the other teachings about humility and listening that are cited above, this teaching encourages us to cultivate our curiosity and to develop a rigorous intellectual discipline. These texts remind us not to be utterly convinced of our views, not to oversimplify, always to be open to new ways of looking at an issue. There are many kinds of knowledge, each important in its own way. Some people may be able to share expert analysis, others first-hand stories, moral judgments, useful insights, challenges, or questions.

At times, we may find ourselves rejecting what someone says automatically, assuming that because we disagree with someone, we have nothing to learn from them. The people with whom we disagree most strongly, however, may have the most to teach us. At other times we may not disagree with someone strongly, but simply assume that he or she has little useful information to offer about the issue at hand. Often, however, we will find that listening can shed light on the various ways that people understand the issue and the dilemmas they are grappling with. These teachings underscore the importance of listening to find value in what each person says. If we find ourselves disregarding someone, we should remind ourselves to listen more carefully and with greater curiosity.

Rabbi Judah Loew of Prague, also known as the Maharal, elaborates on this teaching in an important Sixteenth Century text:

*For the love of research and knowledge, it is advisable that one should not reject anything that contradicts his view. This holds especially true for [an interlocutor] who does not intend to provoke . . . but to honestly declare his beliefs. Even if these are counter to our beliefs and our religion, it is not proper to say to him, “Speak not, say nothing,” for by doing so there will result no clarification of religious beliefs. On the contrary, [one should say,] “speak up . . . as much as you wish . . .” For if one prevents the other from speaking, he thereby reveals the weakness of [one’s own] religious position. . . . Such is the proper manner in which to establish the truth: to hear their arguments which they hold [truthfully] and not merely to provoke. Therefore it is not right to dismiss the words of one’s opponent, but to draw him close and look [carefully] into his words. (Be’er ha-Golah, 7, p. 151)*

### 3. Learning to Listen and Learning to Speak

*The Eternal God has taught me how to speak, even to those tired of speech. Morning by morning God awakens me, awakens my ear: teaching me to listen. (Isaiah 50:4)*

The verse from Isaiah illustrates the intimate connection between speaking and listening, and it offers us several lessons. Isaiah, a prophet whom God has sent to give a message to the nation of Israel, is wise enough to pray for the ability to listen as well as the ability to speak. Isaiah realizes that he must listen to people if he is to speak effectively.

Only when people feel heard are they truly able to hear the message that we might bring them. Many people today, as well as in Isaiah’s time, are “tired of speech.” They may suffer from information overload, since they are constantly asked to take in and evaluate messages and arguments of all different kinds. This can be exhausting, causing them to stop paying attention, even to people who are close to them.

In addition, people often find themselves tired of speech when they are experiencing cynicism, anger, or despair. Words have not helped them to find clarity, peace, or hope, and they no longer want to listen. In the book of Isaiah, for example, the prophet addresses the Jewish people at the start of their exile in

Babylonia. They are in a state of despair, and Isaiah seeks to console them and to convince them that God maintains the covenant with them. At all of these times, people are likely to be resistant to hearing others. When another person listens to them carefully and shows that they care about and understand their concerns and feelings, the possibility for communication opens up.

Listening to people also allows us to find out what words will be meaningful to them. Without listening, we can only recite a predetermined speech—we cannot talk with them, but only to them. In every situation, there are innumerable ideas and feelings we can choose to speak about. It is only by listening to someone that we can find out which ideas and feelings would be most useful to speak about.

Finally, this passage reminds us that the skill of listening is learned, and therefore needs to be taught. Isaiah's teacher is God; our teachers can be anyone from whom we are willing to learn. Like Isaiah, we need to learn how to listen again each day—we are never finished. Every person and every situation we encounter is different and presents us with new challenges. The key is that we need to be awake and to focus deliberately on the act of listening.

#### 4. All Real Living is Meeting

Martin Buber, one of the most influential Jewish philosophers of the twentieth century, developed a full-fledged theory about the spiritual significance of dialogue based upon teachings about speech and listening that are found in Jewish and other traditions. He also wrote a great deal about the practical importance of dialogue.

In his classic work *I and Thou*, Buber posits that there are two different ways we can relate to the Other: as “It” or as “Thou.” In order to experience the sacred and to bring sacredness into the world, we should strive to treat other people, God, and the entire natural world as “Thou.”

It is easy to relate to people as “it”—as objects that are present only to fulfill a given purpose. We filter our perceptions of others through our desires, hopes, fears, and judgments, not seeing them as they truly are. This type of listening focuses on our own needs and wants rather than on truly understanding other human beings. In contrast, when we relate to the other as a “thou,” we establish a connection with the whole person. This brings about a change in ourselves, in the person with whom we relate, and in the entire world. In Buber's conception, the “I” that is part of an “I and Thou” relationship is different from the “I” that exists in an “I and It” relationship. Relating to other people as objects is isolating. We are stuck in ourselves. The sacred is shut out. Appreciating the intrinsic value of other human beings, on the other hand, brings us into relationship with all humanity.

Establishing an “I-Thou” relationship involves setting aside some of our hopes and fears about the other person, surrendering our personal will to change the other person, and allowing ourselves to be influenced by our conversation. We are required to make a conscious effort to learn about the other person as he or she wants to be known.

When two people treat each other as “Thou,” Buber says, they will experience the “indwelling of the Present Being,” the imminent manifestation of God in the world that the Jewish tradition calls the “*shekhinah*.” Dr. Arthur Green, Rector of the Rabbinical School at the Hebrew College in Boston, writes about the *shekhinah*:

*It is the divinity we may experience when enthralled by the beauties of nature, in deep encounter with another human being, or alone in moments of stillness, whenever the heart is open.*

*Judaism claims that this encounter may also take place in the context of sacred study (“Two who are together and study Torah, shekhinah abides in their midst” [Pirkei Avot 3:3]) and that it also has moral dimension: shekhinah is to be found in human acts of justice and compassion.*

(These Are the Words: A Vocabulary of Jewish Spiritual Life, 33)

It may be helpful to remind dialogue participants that dialogue can be one path to encountering the sacred, and that it has much in common with the other more familiar paths that Green mentions: contemplating nature, quiet meditation, study, or good deeds, as well as prayer.

Buber also argues that dialogue is an essential practical tool for repairing the world:

*I believe, despite all, that the peoples in this hour can enter into dialogue, into a genuine dialogue, each of the partners. In a genuine dialogue each of the partners, even when he stands in opposition to the other, heeds, affirms, and confirms his opponent as an existing other. Only so can conflict certainly not be eliminated from the world, but be humanly arbitrated and led towards its overcoming. (from a speech: "Genuine Dialogue and the Possibilities of Peace")*

#### **D. Respect vs. Unwarranted Hatred**

For what was the First Temple destroyed? For [the] three [cardinal] sins that were rampant then: idolatry, sexual immorality, and murder . . . . But in the time of the Second Temple [the Jews] kept busy studying Torah, and performing Jewish laws, and doing acts of kindness; for what then was it destroyed? Because of their unwarranted hatred of each other. From this one may learn that purposeless hatred is as great a sin as idolatry, immorality, and murder combined.

*Babylonian Talmud, Yoma 9b (7th Century CE)*

Rabbi Akiva had twelve thousand pairs of disciples . . . and all died in a single period, because they did not behave respectfully one to the other. . . . All died between Passover and Shavuot. All died the same terrible death.

*Babylonian Talmud, Yevamot 62b (7th Century CE)*

You shall not hate your kinsman in your heart. You shall surely rebuke your neighbor but incur no guilt [because of him]. You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against your kinsfolk. Love your neighbor as yourself.

*Leviticus 19: 17-18*

When you see the donkey of your enemy buckling under his burden, and you feel like passing him by, you should help him lighten his load.

*Exodus 23: 5*

## Interpretation of the Texts

The Jewish tradition contains a number of strong warnings about what happens when people allow their differences to become destructive. It teaches that respecting one another and avoiding needless hatred are important for very practical reasons as well as for spiritual reasons. The Jewish tradition also includes a number of concrete directives and stories about how to respond to hatred in ourselves and in others. This section explores two key teachings about hatred and respect that are found in the Talmud as well as a commandment that is found in the Torah about transforming hatred through gestures of respect and dialogue.

Dialogue can give us a constructive way to deal with our differences and to avoid or alleviate hatred. By helping us to learn about other people and helping other people to learn about us, dialogue enables us to develop mutual respect. It allows us to show honor for other people and gives those other person an opportunity to honor us. Dialogue opens up channels for communication that we can use to resolve or manage our conflicts, preventing them from escalating in ways that produce hatred. It allows us to exchange ideas and to explore possibilities for cooperation even with people who differ from us in radical ways.

### 1. Unwarranted Hatred

In contrast to the concept of “controversy for the sake of heaven,” the Talmud presents us with the concept of “unwarranted hatred,” which it says is “a sin as great as idolatry, immorality, and murder combined.” The text states that the reason for the destruction of the Second Temple, commemorated each summer during the fast of Tisha b’Av, was unwarranted hatred, *sinat chinam*, between Jews. One of the saddest days in the calendar, Tisha b’Av begins a long season of introspection and repentance that culminates in Yom Kippur.

There are various historical accounts of the destruction of the Temple, but many historians argue that at the time of the Roman siege of Jerusalem, conflict between the various Jewish factions of the time had spiraled out of control and had become extremely violent. This conflict weakened the population of the city enormously, contributing to the victory of the Roman army. There is not agreement among scholars as to how much this internal Jewish conflict contributed to the Roman victory, but it is clear that in attributing the destruction of the Temple to *sinat chinam*, the Rabbis meant to teach about the incredible harm that can come as a result of unwarranted hatred.

We see many other examples of the kind of destructive hatred that the Rabbis warned about throughout Jewish history. Over the centuries, there has been enormous tension and conflict between religious and political groupings such as Hasidim and Mitnagidim, reformers and traditionalists, left and right. In many cases, these differences have led to extremely bitter, consuming fights and even to violence and murder. In other cases, these differences have harmed the community in less dramatic ways, preventing collaboration between groups, splitting families, or draining away energy.

The hatred that is described in the text seems to refer both to a feeling and to the actions that arise from it. Many commentators have explored what it means for hatred to be “unwarranted.” One interpretation is that hatred is unwarranted when it is unnecessary, when there are alternative ways of feeling and acting available to us. From this perspective, the text challenges us to examine our hearts and to question whether or not our feelings of hatred and the actions that come from them are really our only options.

Some commentators suggest that all hatred is unwarranted. Others argue that hatred may be justifiable at times, but that we should not assume in any particular case that it is. When we feel hatred, we should



pause to question this feeling and to seek alternatives. Even when we believe that the feeling is warranted, they say, we should be very careful about the way that we express it and respond to it.

We should be especially careful not to let ourselves be motivated by hatred when we criticize someone. The Jewish tradition calls on us to express our disagreements honestly and to criticize actions that we believe are immoral: “Love unaccompanied by criticism is not love . . . Peace unaccompanied by reproof is not peace.” (Midrash Bereshit Rabbah 54:3) As described in the section about “Guarding the Tongue,” however, Jewish tradition teaches that we should be careful when criticizing others to do so in a way that does not shame them or cause them unnecessary hurt. A set of commandments found in the book of Leviticus illustrates the connection between these teachings and the concept of unwarranted hatred:

*You shall not hate your kinsman in your heart. You shall surely rebuke your neighbor but incur no guilt [because of him]. You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against your kinsfolk. Love your neighbor as yourself. (Leviticus 19: 17-18)*

A key lesson that we can draw from these texts is that we always have decisions to make. We can choose to let negative feelings and assumptions grow into hatred and dominate our actions, or we can choose to act on more positive impulses. If we examine our relationship with the person whom we hate, we will often find that there are other ways to see that person and other ways to act. Dialogue can provide an opportunity for people to rework their relationships, to prevent hatred from developing, or to transform it if it has already emerged.

## 2. Respect

In another passage, we are told that twenty-four thousand disciples of Rabbi Akiva died one spring because they failed to treat each other with respect. Commentators describe this lack of respect in various ways: arrogance, egoism, and bitter disputes in which the students forgot that “these and these are both the word of the living God.” Some commentators believe that the students died of a plague, as punishment for their actions. Others say that they were killed in the course of the Bar Kochba uprising, perhaps because their disagreements made them disorganized and susceptible to attack.

To commemorate this tragedy, many traditional Jews observe a period of mourning for several weeks between Passover and Lag b’Omer. They do not conduct weddings, and it is forbidden to listen to instrumental music or even to shave or have one’s hair cut. The joyful spring holiday of Lag b’Omer marks the end of this period.

Jewish tradition teaches that treating people with respect, even through small gestures, can have enormous practical consequences. In a recent Lag b’Omer speech, Rabbi Yitzchok Breitowitz elaborates on the meaning of the word “respect” (*kavod* in Hebrew) and its implications:

*[K]avod is far more than mere civility, politeness, or the thin veneer of tolerance that may mask a barely-concealed disdain; rather, the word kavod is etymologically related to the word for “heaviness,” “weight,” “significance.”*

*Truly honoring a human being means you regard them as inherently significant, weighty, worthwhile, having something of value that they contribute to the world. Kavod means you see the other as a beloved child of G-d as indeed he or she is—to not necessarily agree with all they may have said or done but to recognize the essential goodness within their souls for that too is G-d’s will.*

*As parents and teachers recognize, when we strive to see the goodness in our fellow Jew—even if we have to strain our eyes a little bit—the perception becomes the reality and that goodness*

*becomes manifest and actualized. Conversely, when the message we communicate by word, gesture, or just neglect is “you don’t count,” “you don’t matter,” the recipient responds in kind.* ([www.wsat.org/drusha/two\\_faces\\_of\\_sefirat\\_ha.htm](http://www.wsat.org/drusha/two_faces_of_sefirat_ha.htm))

Dialogue can give us a way to develop respect and show respect, even when it may seem very difficult.

### **3. Transforming Hatred through Respect and Dialogue**

The Midrash provides a brief story that illustrates how gestures of respect and dialogue can transform relationships and help people to overcome hatred. Commenting on the commandment, “When you see the donkey of your enemy buckling under his burden, and you feel like passing him by, you should help him lighten his load,” Rabbi Alexandri explains:

*Two donkey drivers who despised each other were traveling along the same path. One donkey started buckling under his burden and the other donkey driver passed him by. The driver [who was struggling with his donkey] said to the other driver, “It is written in the Torah, ‘When you see the donkey of your enemy buckling under his burden, and you feel like passing him by, you should help him lighten his load.’” [Exodus 23:5] Immediately the other driver went to help him. [While they were working together], they began to speak and the [driver who at first had refused to help] thought to himself, “This fellow really likes me and I had no idea!” Afterwards, they went to an inn together and they ate and drank. So, who caused them to make peace? It was because one of them recalled the Torah, for “. . . it was you who established equity.” [Psalms 99:4] (Midrash Tanchuma (Buber) Mishpatim, 9th Century CE)*

## **IV: Questions for Use in Study Sessions or Dialogue Sessions**

- a. What do you think this text is saying?
  
- b. What resonates for you in this text? What lessons or guidance does it suggest to you for this dialogue? What lessons can you draw from it for other parts of your life?
  
- c. What questions does this text raise for you?
  
- d. What challenges you about this text? Is there anything you disagree with or that disturbs you?

## V: Blessings and Songs

- Shehekianu

Baruch ata Adonai Elohenu Melekh ha'olam shehekianu v'kimanu v'higianu lazman hazeh.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם  
שֶׁהֵחִיָּנוּ וְקִיָּמָנוּ וְהִגִּיעָנוּ לְזֶמֶן הַזֶּה.

*We praise You, Adonai our God, Ruler of the Universe, who gives us life, sustains us, and brings us to this sacred time.*

- Hineh Ma Tov (from Psalms 133:1)

Hineh ma tov uma na'im  
Shevet achim gam yachad.

Hineh ma tov uma na'im  
Shevet achot gam yachad.

הִנֵּה מַה טוֹב וַיְמַה נְעִים שְׁבֵט אַחִים גַּם יַחַד.  
הִנֵּה מַה טוֹב וַיְמַה נְעִים שְׁבֵט אַחֹת גַּם יַחַד.

*Behold how good and pleasant it is for  
brothers and sisters to live together in unity.*

• **Oseh Shalom (from Job 25:2 and the end of the Amidah prayer)**

Oseh shalom, shalom bimromav

Hu ya'aseh shalom aleinu

V'al kol yisra'el v'imru amen

Ya'aseh shalom, ya'aseh shalom

Shalom aleinu

V'al kol yisra'el (repeat)

עוֹשֵׂה שְׁלוֹם בְּמְרוֹמָיו  
הוּא יַעֲשֶׂה שְׁלוֹם עָלֵינוּ  
וְעַל כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמְרוּ אָמֵן

יַעֲשֶׂה שְׁלוֹם, יַעֲשֶׂה שְׁלוֹם,  
שְׁלוֹם עָלֵינוּ וְעַל כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל . . .

*May the One who causes peace to reign in the highest heavens let peace descend upon us,  
upon all Israel, and let us say: Amen.*

# Appendix O

## Questions Answered in Sections 3 - 6

### Chapter 3. Pre-Meeting Explorations and Decisions

#### 3.1 Early Explorations and Decisions

- 3.1.1 What kinds of dialogue programs have been conducted successfully?
- 3.1.2 What are the different roles that I, and others, can play?

#### 3.2 Initial Exploration

- 3.2.1 How are dialogues usually initiated?
- 3.2.2 Where should I start in thinking about what to offer, to whom, and why?
- 3.2.3 What do I need to find out before I decide what to offer, or if I should proceed at all?
- 3.2.4 Who should I talk with to learn these things?
- 3.2.5 How extensive should my explorations or “mapping” be?
- 3.2.6 How can my way of interacting with people before the dialogue contribute to the success of the dialogue?
- 3.2.7 How can I determine if conditions are ripe for dialogue?
- 3.2.8 What are the signs that a convener is unlikely to provide to provide adequate support for a dialogue?

#### 3.3 Deciding Who Will Convene and/or Facilitate

- 3.3.1 What is the role of the facilitator(s)?
- 3.3.2 What is the role of the convener(s)?
- 3.3.3 Who usually plays the role of convener?
- 3.3.4 Can a convening group evolve out of a pilot dialogue group?
- 3.3.5 What are the advantages of planning the dialogue together with a convener?
- 3.3.6 What forms of collaboration work well?
- 3.3.7 Who can play the role of facilitator with credibility?
- 3.3.8 What if I’m asked about my own political views?
- 3.3.9 How can I tell if I am ready to facilitate?
- 3.3.10 What are the advantages and disadvantages of working with a co-facilitator?
- 3.3.11 Should the facilitator(s) be Jewish?
- 3.3.12 Can I both participate and facilitate at the same time?

#### 3.4 Deciding What to Offer

- 3.4.1 When working in a particular community, how should I decide whether to start with a dialogue for the whole community or with a sub-group or “pilot” group?
- 3.4.2 How should I choose between offering a single session or a multi-session dialogue?
- 3.4.3 In multi-session dialogues, what are the advantages and disadvantages of specifying the number of sessions before the program begins?
- 3.4.4 What are the advantages and disadvantages of public dialogue programs (vs. programs for people who are connected with each other through organizations or other important relationships)?
- 3.4.5 Is it helpful to narrow the focus to a particular divisive sub-issue in a one-session dialogue?

### **3.5 Time, Space, and Food**

- 3.5.1 How long should the dialogue take?
- 3.5.2 What if I only have one hour?
- 3.5.3 Where should I hold the dialogue?
- 3.5.4 What about food? How well does a dinner-dialogue work?

### **3.6 Group Size and Composition**

- 3.6.1 What's the ideal number of participants?
- 3.6.2 How important is it for the participants to have substantially different perspectives?
- 3.6.3 How important is an even or balanced distribution of perspectives?
- 3.6.4 Do all the participants have to be Jewish? When and how can we include non-Jews?
- 3.6.5 What about inter-faith dialogues and other kind of inter-group dialogue?
- 3.6.6 How old should the participants be?

### **3.7 Issuing Invitations and Connecting with Participants**

- 3.7.1 How should I invite people?
- 3.7.2 How important is it to require that the participants RSVP?
- 3.7.3 What should I include in a written invitation?
- 3.7.4 What purposes are served by pre-meeting conversations with the participants?
- 3.7.5 How might the pre-meeting conversations influence what I do in the session?
- 3.7.6 When is it necessary to have pre-meeting conversations with the participants?
- 3.7.7 Can pre-meeting e-mails replace phone calls?
- 3.7.8 Can I invite people to a dialogue through a public notice, an announcement at services, or a flyer?
- 3.7.9 Suppose potential participants ask how this will differ from an ordinary conversation?
- 3.7.10 What should I do if a potential participant is reluctant or does not seem genuinely interested?
- 3.7.11 What if invitees say they want to come late or leave early?
- 3.7.12 What if people say they can't come to all of the sessions in a series?

## **Chapter 4. Preparing Your Plan: Decisions About Design**

### **4.1 Basic Elements in Session Design: Sequence, Questions, and Structures**

- 4.1.1 What is a typical sequence in a session?
- 4.1.2 How closely should I follow the formats you provide in Chapter 7?
- 4.1.3 What's a "go-round"?
- 4.1.4 What are the advantages of using go-rounds?
- 4.1.5 How should I decide between using a go-round or "popcorn" format?
- 4.1.6 Should I concern myself with seating arrangements?
- 4.1.7 Who should speak first in a go-round?
- 4.1.8 Can I skip the pauses before the go-rounds?
- 4.1.9 Can I invite people to ask questions of each other after each go-round instead of waiting to complete the set of two or three go-rounds?
- 4.1.10 What are the earmarks of a constructive opening question?
- 4.1.11 When I'm deciding what questions to pose, how important is specific language, sequence, and timing?
- 4.1.12 What are the advantages and disadvantages of posing short and simple questions versus questions with multiple parts?
- 4.1.13 Can I propose different agreements or let the group make up their own?

- 4.1.14 How should I handle the transition from the go-round structure to less structured conversation?
- 4.1.15 How should I introduce myself at the beginning of the dialogue?
- 4.1.16 What kind of language and tone should I use when I'm facilitating?
- 4.1.17 What information should I include in the agenda that I give out to the participants, and what should I write up for myself to use?

#### **4.2 Designing a Single-Session Dialogue**

- 4.2.1 What are the special challenges of single-session design?
- 4.2.2 What should be different about my design if I'm offering a "public" dialogue session?
- 4.2.3 What if I am asked to offer an abbreviated dialogue experience in only an hour?
- 4.2.4 Can I split up a dialogue session into two one-hour components?

#### **4.3 Designing a Multi-Session Series**

- 4.3.2 Should I plan beyond the first meeting?
- 4.3.2 How should the opening session differ from a single-session dialogue?
- 4.3.5 How should I structure a subsequent session?
- 4.3.6 Why use time in subsequent sessions for a "check-in"?
- 4.3.7 How can I design subsequent sessions in a manner that is responsive to participants emerging needs and interests?
- 4.3.8 How can I involve participants in emergent design?
- 4.3.9 Where should I start in creating a custom design?
- 4.3.10 What if my group's interests are not addressed in the suggested question sets?
- 4.3.11 How can I craft questions that are appropriate to the level of trust and connection in the group?
- 4.3.12 How should I design the last session of a series?
- 4.3.13 What if some participants want to continue and some don't?

#### **4.4 Designing for Large Groups**

- 4.4.1 How should I structure a dialogue with a large group?
- 4.4.2 Is it necessary to have facilitators in the small groups?
- 4.4.3 How can I help the small group facilitators prepare for their role?
- 4.4.4 How can I efficiently divide a large group into small groups?
- 4.4.5 How many people should be in each small group?
- 4.4.6 How should I handle the likely latecomers in a large, public event?
- 4.4.7 How should I set up the room?
- 4.4.8 How should I structure a multiple-session dialogue series for a large group?

#### **4.5 Designing a Session to Incorporate a Common Stimulus**

- 4.5.2 How can I incorporate movies, readings, guest presenters, or another common stimulus into a dialogue program?

### **Chapter 5. Getting Yourself Ready for the Session**

#### **5.1 Emotional Preparation and Team Building**

- 5.1.1 How can I prepare myself emotionally to serve the group well?
- 5.1.2 How can I get support to prepare emotionally and develop skills?
- 5.1.3 How can my co-facilitator and I prepare to work well together?
- 5.1.4 What questions should we address when we debrief?



## **5.2 Decisions You Will Need to Make**

5.2.1 As the date approaches, what should I be sure to have decided?

## **5.3 Supplies and Materials**

5.3.1 What supplies and materials will I need?

## **Chapter 6. Facilitating The Dialogue**

### **6.1 What Facilitators Do and Don't Do in a PCP-style Dialogue**

- 6.1.1 What will my role be as the facilitator in a dialogue using the Public Conversations Project approach?
- 6.1.3 What will my central responsibilities be?
- 6.1.3 What are the most important things for me to remember when I'm facilitating?
- 6.1.4 What should I avoid doing?

### **6.2 Interventions: The Basics**

- 6.2.1 What should I do if a participant forgets to observe an agreement?
- 6.2.3 If I need to intervene, how should I do it?
- 6.2.4 What constitutes a "legitimate" intervention?
- 6.2.4 What constitutes a "compassionate" intervention?
- 6.2.5 Is upholding the agreements my only legitimate function?
- 6.2.6 What if someone speaks out of turn in a go-round?
- 6.2.7 Is it really OK for me to interrupt someone?
- 6.2.8 How should I facilitate the less structured part of the dialogue, following the go-rounds?

### **6.3 Responding to Particular Concerns and Challenges**

- 6.3.1 What if the conversation takes a direction that seems problematic to me?
- 6.3.2 What if no one says something for a while?
- 6.3.3 What if some participants speak much more than others?
- 6.3.4 What if there are very different levels of knowledge about history and current events?
- 6.3.5 Can the group work simultaneously toward both educational goals and dialogue goals?
- 6.3.6 What if one person's perspective is quite different from all the others'?
- 6.3.7 Can I call for a break even if it wasn't planned?
- 6.3.8 What if someone becomes very upset or tearful?
- 6.3.9 What if someone becomes very angry?
- 6.3.10 How can I respond constructively to outbursts?
- 6.3.11 What if someone repeatedly neglects to honor the agreements?
- 6.3.12 What if several people are having difficulty maintaining the spirit of the dialogue?
- 6.3.13 What should I do if someone arrives late to a single-session dialogue?

### **6.4 Time Management**

- 6.4.1 How can I help the participants use the time well?
- 6.4.2 What should I do about time when there are no go-rounds?
- 6.4.3 Can I ask the group to help me with managing time?

**6.5 Special Considerations for Multi-Session Groups**

- 6.5.1 What should I do at the second meeting if someone has missed the first meeting?
- 6.5.2 What if someone misses a later session?
- 6.5.3 What if people come late or leave early?
- 6.5.4 What if someone stops attending a series?
- 6.5.5 What if participants want to continue to meet but don't agree on the groups' future direction?
- 6.5.6 What if the group seems ready to self-facilitate?