

Be the change you wish to see. Be peace.

BECAUSE

Because one person can change the world.



CONVERSATION

We do not live in a neutral world at all, but, rather, one in which the landscape is thickly settled with opinions, positions and beliefs about the right and wrong way of perceiving and interacting with the world and each other. As a result, we have interests to protect, ideas and beliefs to defend, difficult or downright crazy colleagues to avoid, and our own way in the world to make. There are certainly times when we must defend our views.

But dialogue is an altogether different way of talking together. Generally, we think of dialogue as "better conversation." But there is much more to it. Dialogue, as I define it, is "a conversation with a center, not sides."

It is a way of taking the energy of our differences and channeling it toward something that has never been created before. It lifts us out of polarization and into a greater common sense, and is thereby a means for accessing the intelligence and coordinated power of groups of people. . . .

In dialogue, one not only solves problems, one *dissolves* them. We do not merely try to reach agreement, we try to create a context from which many new agreements might come, And we seek to uncover a base of shared meaning that can greatly help coordinate our actions with our values.

*From: **Dialogue: The Art of Thinking Together**, by William Isaacs (Currency Books, 1999)*

AN HISTORIC DIALOGUE

At a time of the 13th century war between Muslims and Christians, Ayyubi Sultan Al Kamil and St. Francis of Assisi were able to dialogue. This encounter, though not a perfect model for a faith and politics dialogue, can certainly point us in the right direction. We see that both sides became willing to listen to the other. Both sides held onto their own religious beliefs, yet were able to learn from each other. Both sides changed in the process. Their efforts influenced others.

Francis had originally fought in the Crusades and then had a conversion. He saw war from the inside and believed that there had to be a better way. "Francis began his prophetic resistance to the violence of the Crusades by meeting first with his own religious leaders, begging Cardinal Pelagius, the Christian commander, to stop the fighting. Pelagius refused."

When he had no success at convincing the Christians to stop the war, he decided to go to the Sultan. This was no spur of the moment activity. It took time and preparation. "We read in the story that the whole journey to the Sultan took a full year's time. Perhaps that was the time for Francis to prepare how he would approach and what he would say to the Sultan."

Francis had the goals of ending the war, converting the Sultan to Christianity, and becoming a martyr in the process. If we only look at the initial goals, we would see this trip



as a failure on all three counts. Yet, in the process something new unfolded. "He was able to stand firm in his convictions while being open to hearing another."

Before the dialogue the Sultan had decreed that anyone who brought him the head of a Christian should be rewarded with a Byzantine gold piece. Yet when the Sultan and Francis were face to face, there was no longer a call for violence. Ayyubi Sultan Al Kamil, in Damietta welcomed Saint Francis and gathered for him a group of Muslim scholars to exchange with them their views and ideas about religious matters. Just as St. Francis was a true believer in Christianity, so also was Sultan Al Kamil with regard to Islam. Hence they both agreed to continue the dialogue on the principle of ending violence and bloodshed,

and to pursue the dialogue to achieve peace and justice among people.

"Francis shared with his community his new and deep respect for his Muslim brothers and sisters, breaking down the cycle of enmity and misunderstanding that fueled the Crusades. Francis was especially struck by the Muslim prayer practice of prostrations in worship of God; his letters urged Christians to adopt a similar practice."

"Stories of the time told about the change in the Sultan after his encounter with Francis. He placed Francis under his personal security and provided safe-conduct through Muslim states. From then on, several accounts relate that he treated Christian prisoners of war with unprecedented kindness and generosity."

"If we are not willing to be

changed by what we hear, we are not really listening to the other. We sabotage our efforts to restore right relationships."

Their meeting appears to have changed more than Francis and the Sultan.

"Almost immediately we see some iconography in the eastern world showing these two men," Father Cusato said. One of the sultan's own spiritual counselors had engraved on his tomb that what changed his life was the meeting between a Christian monk and the sultan in his tent.

*Maureen Leach, OSF, is the author of **Insights on the Journey: Trauma, Healing & Wholeness**-an anthology of women's writing.*



The great secret of succeeding in conversation is:
to admire little,
to hear much;
always to distrust our own reason, and sometimes that of our friends;
never to pretend to wit, but to make that of others appear as much as possibly we can;
to hearken to what is said
and to answer to the purpose.

Benjamin Franklin

TWO TYPES OF LISTENING

Competitive / Combative Listening

happens when we are more interested in promoting our own point of view than in understanding or exploring someone else's view. We either listen for openings to take the floor, or for flaws or weak points we can attack. As we pretend to pay attention we are impatiently waiting for an opening, or internally formulating our rebuttal and planning our devastating comeback that will destroy their argument and make us the victor.

Active/Reflective Listening

happens when we are genuinely interested in understanding what the other person is thinking, feeling, wanting or what the message means, and we are active in checking out our understanding before we respond with our own new message. We restate or paraphrase our understanding of their message and reflect it back to the sender for verification.

From: **The Facilitator's Manual for the Class of Nonviolence**, by Susan Ives (peaceCENTER, 2007)

ENGAGING CONFLICT

The willingness to engage conflict nonviolently can be greatly enhanced by having some knowledge of our own motivation as well as some communication techniques to help the process. A trained peer, professional, or non-professional, can be the mediator who encourages and facilitates the dialog. Programs in schools such as peer mediation are frequently extracurricular and depend on the dedication of a faculty member or an administrator. Life skills learned at an early age can also make a positive impact.

Learning these skills is very much like learning a foreign language. Fluency cannot be gained if the skills are seldom practiced and are not

integrated into everyday life. When these skills are taught from a very young age and are modeled, we are more likely to use the skills fluently to solve large and small problems.

Engaging conflict with words, not violence, takes time and effort. The dominant culture needs clear definitions of win/lose and quick resolutions. Authentic resolutions take energy and are seldom quick fixes. The hopeful result of mediation is a transformation of individuals as well as resolution of the seemingly hopeless situation.

From: **Peace is Our BirthRight**, by Ann E. Helmke and Rosalyn Falcón Collier (peaceCENTER, 2007)



WORD ORIGINS

argue 1303, from O.Fr. *arguer*, from L. *argutare* "to prattle" freq. of *arguere* "to make clear, demonstrate," from Proto-Indo-European *argu-yo-, from base *arg- "to shine, be white, bright, clear".

conversation 1340, from O.Fr. *conversation*, from L. *conversationem* (nom. *conversatio*) "act of living with," prp. of *conversari* "to live with, keep company with," lit. "turn about with," from L. *com-* intens. prefix + *vertare*, freq. of *vertere*. Originally "having dealings with others," also "manner of conducting oneself in the world;" specific sense of "talk" is 1580.

debate c.1300, from Fr. *debattre* (13c.), orig. "to fight," from *de-* "down, completely" + *batre* "to beat."

dialogue c.1225, "literary work consisting of a conversation between two or more people," from O.Fr. *dialoge*, from L. *dialogus*, from Gk. *dialogos*, related to *dialogesthai* "converse," from *dia-* "across" + *legein* "speak". Sense broadened to "a conversation" 1401.

discourse c.1374, alteration of L. *discursus* "a running about," in L.L. "conversation," from stem of *discurrere* "run about," from *dis-* "apart" + *currere* "to run." Sense of "formal speech or writing" is first recorded 1581.

discussion c.1340, from O.Fr. *discussion*, from L.L. *discussionem* "examination, discussion," in classical L., "a shaking," from *discussus*, pp. of *discutere* "strike asunder, break up," from *dis-* "apart" + *quatere* "to shake." Originally "examination, investigation, judicial trial;" meaning of "talk over, debate" first recorded 1448. Sense evolution in L. appears to have been from "smash apart" to "scatter, disperse," then in post-classical times to "investigate, examine," then to "debate."

From: *The Online Etymology Dictionary*, www.etymonline.com

In any gathering a key ingredient to a successful outcome is ... intentionally

PREPARING THE SPACE FOR CONVERSATION

"Tell me and I forget, teach me and I remember, involve me and I learn." Benjamin Franklin

1. Prepare the space and welcome all people who respond. The Circle of Peace must be just that: a circle.
2. Treat all people's feelings and concerns with respect.
3. Remember to design activities for involvement and learning.
4. Help people to focus by using music and breathing/centering exercises: invest two minutes in each exercise at the beginning of the time together.
5. Accept all responses, explore consequences, emphasize positive alternatives.

6. The circle of peace is a gathering place where everyone can feel safe.

7. Some simple ground rules can be helpful: One person speaks at a time, Tell the truth, Be respectful, Work hard to resolve the issues, Use creative listening, Brainstorm different solutions.

!!!Prepare your heart for a special time to share yourself with your guests!!!

*adapted from: **Working It Out! Managing & Mediating Everyday Conflicts** by Rosalyn Falcón Collier (peaceCENTER, 2007)*

"... TO BE PATIENT TOWARD ALL THAT IS UNSOLVED IN YOUR HEART AND TO TRY TO LOVE THE QUESTIONS THEMSELVES LIKE LOCKED ROOMS AND LIKE BOOKS THAT ARE WRITTEN IN A VERY FOREIGN TONGUE. DO NOT NOW SEEK THE ANSWERS, WHICH COULD NOT BE GIVEN YOU BECAUSE YOU WOULD NOT BE ABLE TO LIVE THEM. AND THE POINT IS, TO LIVE EVERYTHING. LIVE THE QUESTIONS NOW. PERHAPS YOU WILL THEN GRADUALLY, WITHOUT NOTICING IT, LIVE ALONG SOME DISTANT DAY INTO THE ANSWER."

From: Rainer Maria Rilke
Rilke on Love and Other Difficulties (Norton, 1975)

But I want to DO SOMETHING!

Don't just stand there, do something! The American way. Get into action. Fix things.

Yes, there's a lot to do. Research. Writing to your congresspeople expressing your views. Attending lectures and meetings. Joining organizations that reflect your views. Volunteering your time. Taking your perspectives to the courts or to the streets.

Conversation Cafés are not *instead* of action. They are *before* action—a place to gather your thoughts, find your natural allies, discover your blind spots, open your heart to the heart of "the other."

ALL MOVEMENTS BEGIN IN CONVERSATION

From the Conversation Café, www.conversationcafe.org

GOOD BOOKS

Open Space Technology: A User's Guide by Harrison Owen (Berrett-Koehler, 1999) *Learn more about the technique we are using in Soul of a Citizen in this manual.*

Dialogue: The Art of Thinking Together by William Isaacs (Currency, 1999) *Isaacs offers concrete ideas for both listening and speaking; for avoiding the forces that undermine meaningful conversation; for changing the physical setting of the dialogue to change its quality. The outcome, he says, can be quite different from the traditional winner-loser structure of arguments and debates.*

The World Cafe: Shaping Our Futures Through Conversations That Matter by Juanita Brown & David Isaacs (Berrett-Koehler, 2005) *Context, hospitable spaces, questions that matter, encouraging everyone's contribution, cross-pollination of diverse perspectives, listening for patterns, cultivating collective intelligence and insight through dialog instead of debate—this book has it all.*

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Since 1995, the all-volunteer and interfaith peaceCENTER continues to be a significant community catalyst for peace in San Antonio, Texas. Compassion and Justice are our strong guiding lights. Contemplative Practices, Experiential Education, and Nonviolent Actions are our working expressions throughout the community at large.

The peaceCENTER is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization
285 Oblate Drive San Antonio, TX 78216
www.sanantoniopeace.center