GUIDE TO
ARAB/ PALESTINIAN/ JEWISH
DIALOGUE
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Developed by the
CROSS NATIONAL ARAB/JEWISH
DIALOGUE SUPPORT NETWORK

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**WHAT IS DIALOGUE?**

Dialogue is a communication process that allows participants to hear and be heard. Harold Saunders, eminent diplomat and dialogue practitioner, defines dialogue as “a process of genuine interaction through which human beings listen to each other deeply enough to be changed by what they learn.” In a dialogue, it is not necessary to convince or defend; dialogue gives people the freedom to explore, learn, and create new meaning in the interaction. Speakers and listeners suspend judgments and assumptions, and create an open environment in which people can listen to others’ experiences and perspectives through new lenses. Dialogue provides an opportunity to build trust with others that hold different views, and to speak one’s own truth and hear others’ truths. Dialogue allows people to express their uncertainties and ambiguities, creating a bridge between people with different views.

Dialogue is based on mutual respect and a willingness to acknowledge the experiences and opinions of others. It is a process of mutual learning in which participants may change their attitudes and perspectives as a result of the interaction. While dialogue is not a problem solving process, it can be a powerful method for creating common ground and a sense of deeper connection among the participants. Dialogue can even lead to joint action, though that may not be an initial goal of the process.

People engage in dialogue for many reasons. They may be genuinely curious about the opinions of others on an issue and a want to explore the topic further. They may want to relieve tension with people or groups toward whom they feel animosity and distrust, or address an issue that divides constituencies or communities. Dialogue can also play an important role in non-governmental public peacemaking in intractable political or identify conflicts.

**Dialogue vs. Debate**

We can understand dialogue by looking at what it is not. The following chart compares dialogue and debate.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dialogue</th>
<th>Debate</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Is about exploring common ground</td>
<td>Is about winning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uses listening to understand, find meaning and agreement</td>
<td>Uses listening to find flaws and make counter arguments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helps people re-examining positions and assumptions</td>
<td>Requires that people defend their positions and assumptions as truth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assumes that many people have pieces of the answer</td>
<td>Assumes that there is a right answer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helps people work together toward a common understanding</td>
<td>Requires that people attempt to prove the other side wrong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognizes that other’s thinking can improve on one’s own</td>
<td>Implies that people must defend one’s own views against those of others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asks people to suspend judgment</td>
<td>Implies that people will be judgmental</td>
</tr>
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</table>
**Why Is Dialogue Important in the Israeli/Palestinian Conflict?**

Israelis and Palestinians view this historic conflict with parallel realities. I.F. Stone, the legendary journalist, said of the Israelis and Palestinians that they “sit not just in separate rooms, like employers and strikers in a bitter labor dispute, but in separate universes where the simplest fact often turns out to have diametrically opposite meanings.”

The Israeli and Palestinian narratives are so distinct that the dialogue process is essential if members of each group and their supporters are going to understand and acknowledge the other’s perspectives and reality. There are scores of Arab/Palestinian dialogue groups operating in the U.S., some for as long as 20 years. Hundreds of groups also formed in Israel and the occupied territories after the first Intifada, and then again after the Oslo Peace Accords, in an attempt to engage the public in activities that would foster mutual understanding and co-existence in anticipation of a peace agreement.

After the breakdown of Oslo and the start of the second Intifada, many groups disbanded in Israel/Palestine because of logistical challenges, distrust, and concerns of “collaborating” with the enemy. At the same time, many dialogue groups were initiated in the U.S., motivated by people who wanted to understand the other reality and who, in the words of one dialogue group, “refuse to be enemies.” The same motivations played a role in renewed efforts after the events of 9/11.

These dialogue efforts on both sides of the Atlantic have focused on relationship issues such as dehumanization, fear, identity, and historical roots of the conflict. These efforts are beyond the scope of official governmental mediation and negotiation but can constitute a significant public peace process. Harold Saunders writes that dialogue can "reach toward the heart of the relationship where enemies are made, where reconciliation takes place, and where fundamental change can produce working relationships capable of post-conflict peace-building."

**Problems With Arab/Jewish/Palestinian Dialogue**

The Cross National Arab/Jewish Dialogue Support Network conducted a survey of Palestinian/Arab/Jewish dialogue participants to assess their needs. Many of the concerns expressed by our respondents were identified in a remarkable set of articles published in the *Journal of Palestinian Studies* in 1988. The articles were written by Jonathan Kuttab, a Palestinian lawyer and peace activist, and Edy Kauffman, a professor of political science at Hebrew University. The following summary of their contributions was developed by Melinda Smith.

Jonathan Kuttab on Dialogue. In the article, Kuttab asserts that “peace, justice and reconciliation can be tremendously advanced by an open dialogue between members of an oppressed group and the oppressor group. In the process, both sides benefit and both sides advance. Groundwork can thus be laid for true co-existence.” However, Kuttab expresses the following concerns:

1. **False Symmetry.** There is an assumption of false symmetry between the oppressor and the oppressed; between the occupier and the occupied; between the powerful and the weak. The dialogue process presents the meeting of individuals from these two groups as an open and free meeting between equals.
2. **Failure to Acknowledge Deep Conflicts and Differences.** There is a tendency to avoid the hard issues or ignore them completely because they are difficult to discuss or come to consensus about. These issues include land, water resources, national rights, and boundaries. It is easier to emphasize some of the superficial manifestations of the conflict.

3. **Tendency to Accept the Status Quo.** Dialogue processes tend to accept what is rather than what ought to be; what is possible vs. what is right. Certain issues are sometimes not allowed to be addressed and certain assumptions, explicit or implicit, are made. Kuttab notes that if one has questions about the moral, ethical, national legitimacy of a Jewish state, that person might not be seen as a candidate for dialogue.

4. **Pressure to Compromise or Abandon Positions Held within One’s Community.** While it is important to remain open-minded and willing to change positions, pressure, exerted in the name of realism, pragmatism and moderation to accept things that from a moral point of view, should not be accepted. A participant might lose credibility within his own community.

5. **Tendency to Make Dialogue a Substitute for Action.** While it is important to engage Palestinians and Jews in the process, it should not be an end unto itself. Dialogue can assuage the conscience of members of the oppressor group and become a safety valve for venting frustrations for members of the oppressed group.

6. **Dialogue Can Be Co-opted by Authorities to Divide the Oppressed Community.** Dialogue participants could be set up as an alternative leadership but no concessions are made to them because they are not viewed as being representative.

Despite these pitfalls, Kuttab is an advocate of dialogue and recommends the following guidelines to have a successful process:

1. Seek the truth without pretense, falsity or attempts at accommodation.
2. Seek real “enemies” with whom to dialogue and not moderates or people on the other side who are like-minded.
3. Avoid panaceas. Don’t try to find the magic formula for solving the whole problem. Dialoguers should be conscious of their limitations and humbly seek to work for justice in matters they can affect.
4. Never use or attempt to manipulate the other partner in the dialogue. Don’t attempt to force the other side to alter their positions.
5. Keep your whole society in mind when dialoguing with members of another society.
6. Dialogue must only be a first and a preliminary step toward action – joint or separate action aimed at opposing injustice.

Edy Kaufman on Dialogue. Edy Kaufman, a professor of political science at Hebrew University, has organized Palestinian/Israeli dialogues for many years. He provides his own recommendations for dialogue, in part in response to Jonathan Kuttab.

1. **Deep Conflicts and Issues.** It is important to approach substantive issues in an orderly way, dialoguing on a sustained basis over time, concentrating on process as well as on outcome. Dialogue is not a series of isolated events, but a sustained, ongoing activity. Concrete long-term agendas should be worked out to insure that the real issues at stake will indeed be dealt with.

2. **Rules Established by Consent of Entire Group.** Rules for the process and the dynamics of the dialogue must be established by the entire group, and must provide fair and ample
opportunity to both sides to address issues of concern. Each side should be alert to the sensitivities of the other.

3. **Status Quo/Normalization.** Dialoguers should neither seek to legitimize the present order of things nor shy away from viewing the present order of things as a point of departure. Palestinians could consider accepting the existence of Israel as a fact but they don’t have to consider its foundation as a legitimate “right.”

4. **Dialogue vs. Action.** To discount a dialogue process in which many eyes are opened simply because no concrete action issues from it may be, in the long run, counterproductive. Building up relationships based on trust is an important prerequisite for joint action based not only on altruism and self-interest but also on a keen motivation to work together for a more mutually viable society than currently exists.

Through their experiences in Palestinian/Israeli dialogue, Kuttab and Kaufman illustrate the different perspectives and contexts that Israelis and Palestinians bring to the process. Kuttab cautions that Palestinians “are living under daily oppression that requires immediate action and specific solutions to their problems rather than lengthy theoretical discourses that are unlikely to have an immediate effect on matters that are of concern to them.” In the U.S. dialogue groups, some Palestinian participants have mirrored these concerns of dialogue without action. It is important to recognize these issues when convening dialogue groups and to consider how they apply to the concerns of members of U.S. dialogue groups.

“I like to believe that people, in the long run, are going to do more to promote peace than our governments. Indeed, I think that people want peace so much that one of these days governments had better get out of their way, and let them have it.”

- President Dwight Eisenhower
TOOLS FOR STRUCTURING AND FACILITATING DIALOGUE

Convening a Dialogue Group

Many of the dialogue groups in the U.S. are initiated by a team of a Palestinian or Arab and a Jew who have had some contact with each other through social, religious, political, or civic activities. If individuals want to initiate a group but have no partner, they should consider making contacts in the faith communities. There may be an interfaith group with Palestinian or Jewish counterparts. Partners may also be sought through a local chapter of the Arab American Anti-Discrimination Committee, Jewish community centers, mosques, and synagogues. For university students, many campuses have a campus Hillel, Union of Palestinian Students, or a Moslem Students Association to draw participants from.

Conveners should think about the following questions before recruiting participants:
1) What are the goals? 2) Who will participate and how many? 3) How will members be recruited? 4) What will motivate them? 5) Do the conveners have enough time and energy to organize the group? 6) Who will facilitate?

Goals. Conveners can outline general goals and have the group later ratify or amend them. Goals might include 1) creating positive relationships between Palestinians and Jews, 2) addressing the critical issues of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, and 3) contributing to a collective public peace process.

Participants. Some groups try to recruit an even number of Jews and Palestinians while others don’t attempt to balance membership. Other groups have diverse members, including Jews, Palestinians, other Arab Americans, Muslims, and others interested in the process. Numbers range from 6-20, though it is difficult to have an effective discussion with more than 15 people. There are challenges to recruiting Jews from the mainstream communities and there is also Palestinian resistance to dialogue, as noted above. The contacts and influence of the conveners are essential in forming a group. Conveners can meet with potential members in person, present materials from other dialogue groups, or send formal invitations.

Organization. It takes time and energy to organize a sustained dialogue group. Groups often create an email list and participants are sent notices of every meeting. Meetings often rotate between members’ houses, and people share potluck dinners or dessert at meetings to create a warm atmosphere. Organizational responsibilities can grow if groups decide to engage in public education activities.

Facilitation. It is critical that the facilitator of the dialogue group have basic knowledge of the techniques of facilitation and be trusted by group members. In many groups the two conveners facilitate initial meetings. Sometimes facilitation is rotated among members of the group. Some groups have professionally trained facilitators who might not be Jewish or Palestinian. Some groups pay a neutral facilitator. It is important to remember that if the conveners or group members facilitate a session, they should refrain from participating as a group member during that time.
next sections will provide guidelines for facilitation in order that group members may take on this task with confidence.

If groups want to find a trained facilitator, there are networks of mediators and trained facilitators in almost every city in the U.S. There are mediation centers in every major city that may have trained facilitators willing to help. Useful resources to identify a facilitator include the National Association for Community Mediation in Washington D.C. or the Public Conversations Project. Contact information is listed in the Appendix.

“Lions believe that everyone shares their state of mind.”
- Proverb of Mexico

“A fool is too arrogant to make amends; upright men know what reconciliation means.”
- Hebrew proverb
Dialogue Guidelines

There are a number of sample guidelines or agreements that have been developed by different groups. Here are some samples that you can adapt, modify or use as the group sees fit. Group conveners can show these to potential participants and ask for agreement of these or similar guidelines at the first meeting.

DIALOGUE PRINCIPLES

**Respect and honor differences**: listen for understanding, not to agree with or believe what is being said.

**Suspend assumptions and judgments**: notice when you feel upset about what is being said and try to relate it to your assumptions and preconceived assumptions.

**Relate your personal experiences**: speak for yourself, not for others in the group or in your tradition or in generalizations.

**Focus on inquiry and reflection**: ask open-ended questions with the intention of gaining insight and perspective. Take time to reflect on what has been said; notice connections and commonalities.

**Put aside the need for an immediate outcome**: the purpose of dialogue is to be open to new understanding, not to come up with an answer or a solution.

GUIDELINES FOR DIALOGUE PARTICIPANTS

Listen with an open heart and mind.
Speak respectfully so that others can hear.
Don’t criticize other participants or attempt to persuade them.
Express feelings and perspectives in a way that will help others understand rather than feel alienated or antagonistic.
Have as a goal mutual understanding vs. agreement with your point of view.
Don’t interrupt when others are speaking.
Keep an open mind and listen to learn and understand.
Speak within the time frames agreed upon.
Identify what you don’t understand and ask questions to learn, not to argue.
Participants can pass if they don’t want to speak.
Make commitments to participate until the end of the meeting and during the time frame agreed upon by the group.
Avoid assigning intentions, beliefs or motives to others.
Structuring the First Dialogue Session

The first session is critical in setting the tone for group interaction and giving participants a chance to get to know each other. Dialogue sessions can be structured with the following components.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Welcome/purpose/introductions</th>
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<tr>
<td>Review of guidelines or ground rules</td>
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<tr>
<td>Trigger question with responses by all group members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarifying questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interactive discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closing</td>
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The following sample agendas offer ideas for a three-session dialogue. Some of the questions and methods are drawn with permission from the work of the Public Conservation Project and the Public Dialogue Consortium. The Public Conversations Project has been a national leader in training in approaches to dialogue on challenging issues. Please visit their website at http://publicconversations.org. Their dialogue manual, Constructive Conversations about Challenging Times, A Guide to Community Dialogue, may be downloaded from their website.

Either the conveners or a facilitator should lead the session. Members of successful dialogue efforts have reported that exploring identity, life experiences, and feelings related to the conflict is an important way to begin the conversation and to build trust. Building trust and a greater understanding among diverse people embedded in longstanding conflict require deep, compassionate listening and a non-judgmental attitude, or at least the ability to temporarily suspend judgment.

People might feel impatient to initiate discussions about the substantive issues, but laying the groundwork is critical to dialogue. Facilitators should work with the group to get agreements about when they want to initiate discussions on substantive issues. It may be after two sessions or ten. The following sample agendas for the first three sessions are suggestions only, to provide groups with structure and focus. Group leaders should get agreement from members about the approach and what questions will be explored in each session.

**SAMPLE AGENDA FOR FIRST DIALOGUE SESSION**

**Purpose:** This session allows participants to establish agreements/ground rules about how they want to communicate, share personal information and experiences that have shaped their views of the conflict, use listening skills, and create connections among the group members.

Welcome by Conveners
Conveners introduce themselves and welcome participants. Conveners explain their motivations in initiating the group and their ideas on the goals of the group. Confirm the time period of the first session (2 hours is standard).
Brief Introduction of Participants
Participants introduce themselves, where they are from, and their motivations for participating. Introductions should be kept at one minute or less, since participants will have ample opportunities to tell their stories.

Creating Guidelines/Ground Rules
Participants make agreements about how they want to communicate. The facilitator can present a set of sample guidelines on chart paper or handouts, or the group can come up with a set of agreements themselves. Sample guidelines are provided below. Participants should adopt the agreements by consensus and they should serve as a guide to all of their subsequent interactions. Establish a clear time frame for how long the group will meet, (e.g., six months, one year, etc.) Participants might need time to make final time commitments.

Question #1
The facilitator asks each participant to respond to the following question:

*What events or other personal life experiences have shaped your current views and feelings about the conflict?*

Go around the room and allow each participant to respond to the question. This is not an open discussion but a **round robin**, in which each participant talks while others listen. Allow each person to speak for 3-5 minutes. Remind participants that there will be time for interactive discussion after the round robin.

Clarifying Questions
Allow participants to ask each other questions about what they said. Each person should ask no more than one question in this segment in the interests of time and equal participation. People can pass if they choose. These questions should arise out of curiosity about feelings, beliefs and experiences expressed by the participants. They should not be asked to challenge the perspectives of others or engage in an exchange about particular issues. Make clear that in this round of interactive questions, the goal is mutual understanding vs. agreement or trying to persuade the other person. The facilitator can model this segment by asking a first clarifying question of one of the participants. Questions are not for: satisfying your own curiosity, showing off your knowledge, couching criticism, challenging, offering opinions, advocating your position.

Sample questions:
- *What did you mean by your comment (refer to the comment)?*
- *You said you were deeply affected when you spent time in Israel. Could you say more about that?*

Question #2
The facilitator will ask each participant to respond to the following question:

*What did you hear tonight that was a surprise, made you think differently, or challenged an assumption you held?*

Go around the room in a **round robin** process and allow each participant to respond. Remind participants that each participant talks and others listen. This is not an interactive session.
Closing
Ask participants to respond to either or both of the following closing sessions.

- **Comment on how the conversation went for you and what contributed to it, including how you communicated with the group.**
- **What did you learn or value about this conversation?**

Next Meeting
Set a time and place for the next meeting. If everyone agrees, the questions that the group will explore during the second session can include:

- **How has the conflict affected your individual identity or your identity as a Jew, an Arab, or a Palestinian?**
- **What are your views, hopes and fears regarding the conflict? What is the most important issue of the conflict for you?**

\[\text{“When two human beings have to settle something and neither has the power to impose anything on the other, they have to come to an understanding. Then justice is consulted, for justice alone has the power to make wills coincide.”} \]
- Simone Weil in *Waiting on God*

\[\text{“The peacemaker gets two thirds of the blows.”} \]
- Montenegrin proverb

\[\text{“A frog in the well does not know the ocean.”} \]
- Proverb of Japan
Structuring the Second and Subsequent Sessions

Below is a sample agenda for a second dialogue meeting. There are many possible approaches to the initial meetings, but an effective structure should include open ended questions posed by the group facilitator, clarifying questions asked by participants, and structured interaction among participants. The group can reach consensus on the questions they want to address and schedule them for subsequent meetings.

SAMPLE AGENDA FOR SECOND DIALOGUE SESSION

**Purpose:** *This session allows participants to further explore their individual and group identities, identify their hopes and fears and important issues, and reflect on their differences and areas where they want to learn more.*

Welcome by Conveners
Conveners welcome participants. Ask participants if they have had any reflections they want to offer on the impact of the first meeting.

Review of Guidelines/Ground Rules
Briefly review the guidelines the group has agreed to.

**Question #1**
The facilitator asks each participant to respond to the following question:

- *How has the conflict affected your individual identity or your identity as a Jew, an Arab, or a Palestinian?*

Go around the room and allow each participant to respond to the question. This is not an open discussion but a **round robin**, in which each participant talks while others listen. Allow each person to speak for 3-5 minutes. Remind participants that there will be time for interactive discussion after the round robin.

**Question #2**
Ask participants to respond to one or both of the following questions, in a **round robin/talking circle**. Give participants 3-5 minutes to respond.

- *What is the most important issue of the conflict for you?*
- *What are your hopes and fears regarding the conflict?*

Clarifying Questions
Have participants ask each other clarifying questions. Participants can be prompted to ask questions in response to the following:

- *Is there something someone said that you'd like to understand better?*
- *Have you heard something you disagreed with? Check to see if you understood it correctly.*
Closing
Ask participants to respond to any or all of the following questions to close the meeting.

- Have you heard something that triggered new thoughts or feelings?
- What have you heard here challenged your understanding of these issues?

SAMPLE AGENDA FOR THIRD DIALOGUE SESSION

**Purpose:** This session allows members to explore their doubts and areas of confusion or difference about the conflict and frame questions that might lead to further inquiry in subsequent sessions.

Welcome by Conveners
Conveners welcome participants.

Review of Guidelines/Ground Rules
Briefly review the guidelines the group has agreed to.

Question #1
Ask participants to respond to the following question, in a round robin. Give participants 3-5 minutes to respond.

*What information did you hear during the previous sessions that you didn’t know, was different than your previous understanding of the issues?*

It may be helpful if the facilitator records responses on chart paper on the wall. When all participants have responded, review the list. The group can review the list and consolidate it into a shorter list of issues or questions that have been raised. This can serve as discussion items for subsequent sessions.

Question #2
Ask participants to respond to the following question, in a round robin. Give participants 3-5 minutes to respond.

*Have you experienced any mixed feelings, value conflicts, or areas of confusion or uncertainty about the Israeli/Palestinian conflict? What are they?*

In the same way, record on chart paper participants’ responses. Ask participants to identify common themes that emerge from the list. Identify themes that can serve as the basis for future discussion.

Talking Circle Process

An alternative to agendas for the first several sessions described above, or to the round robin process described above, is the talking circle approach. Talking circles, peacemaking circles, or healing circles are deeply rooted in the traditional practices of indigenous people. In North America, they are widely used among the First Nation people of Canada and the hundreds of tribes of Native
Americans in this country, most notably among the one form of group communication Ojibwe and Lakota in this region.

The circle process establishes a very different style of communication than most from European tradition are used to. Rather than aggressive debate and challenging each other, often involving only a few more assertive individuals, the circle process establishes a safe non-hierarchical place in which all present have the opportunity to speak without interruptions. Rather than active verbal facilitation, communication is regulated through the passing of a talking piece (an object of special meaning or symbolism to the circle facilitator who is usually called the circle keeper). The talking piece fosters respectful listening and reflection. It prevents one to one debating or attacking. After brief opening comments by the circle keeper about the purpose of the talking circle, listing of ground rules and asking for additional contributions to the ground rules, the circle keeper says a few things about the talking piece and then passes it to the person on the left, clockwise. Only the person with the talking piece can speak. If others jump in with comments, the circle keeper reminds them of the ground rules and re-focuses on the person with the talking piece. Participants are not required to speak: this would create an un-safe, pressured tone to the circle. If someone feels unable to speak they can simply pass the talking piece to the next person.

Purpose: To create a safe, non-judgmental, place to discuss an issue or react to a speaker or film that allows the opportunity for each person to speak, without interruptions.

Intent: To engage in a sharing of authentic personal reactions and feelings that are owned by each individual and acknowledged by others, without judgment or condemnation.

Ground Rules:
1. Listen with respect.
2. Each person gets a chance to talk.
3. One person talks at a time. Don’t cut people off.
4. Speak for yourself and not as the representative of any group.
5. It’s OK to disagree. No name-calling or attacking.

Process:
1. Opening comments by circle facilitator/keeper
   - Set a relaxed and open tone
   - Welcome everyone and create a friendly and relaxed atmosphere
   - Explain the purpose of the talking circle
   - Present above 5 basic ground rules and ask for additional thoughts about ground rules
   - Explain how a process we have learned from the wisdom of numerous indigenous cultures, most specifically Native American, will be used to create a safe and respectful place for sharing our thoughts and feelings. A talking piece will be passed around the circle and only the person with the piece has the opportunity to speak. If for some reason you do not feel comfortable or able to speak pass the talking piece to the next person
2. First pass of talking piece: introductions
3. Second pass: what are your feelings and thoughts about the Israeli Palestinian conflict?
4. Third pass: what are the implications of the conflict on your life? How does it impact you?
5. Facilitate open discussion/dialogue without talking piece
Closing comments and thanks for participants’ contributions.

“…whosoever killith a human being for other than manslaughter or corruption in the earth, it shall be as if he had killed all mankind, and who so saveth the life of one, it shall be as if he had saved the life of all mankind.”
- Qur’an

Guide for Facilitators

Facilitators are neutral servants of the group. In this role, they help guide participants through their discussion and inquiry without injecting their perspectives. If facilitators are members of the dialogue group, it is best to rotate that position so that facilitators have a chance to contribute their perspectives and narratives as participants as well. The following are guidelines that will help the facilitator understand his/her role.

Role of Facilitator
- Does not evaluate or contribute ideas
- Focuses the group on a common task or area of inquiry
- Helps participants adhere to ground rules
- Suggests alternative methods and procedures
- Protects individuals and their ideas from attack
- Encourages participation
- Coordinates meeting logistics
- Works with participants to shape the process and decide on the course of the group.
- Records ideas and keeps the group member when appropriate

Tools for Facilitating Meetings
- Make agreements about the role of the facilitator at the beginning. This will give facilitators the authority to intervene if they need to.
- Involve all members in discussion.
- Give people time to think.
- Help participants stay focused.
- Help participants adhere to guidelines.
- Clarify, paraphrase and summarize discussion points to facilitate understanding.
- If a theme or idea begins to emerge, note it and ask participants to continue to comment on it.
- Have participants ask clarifying questions about points they don’t understand.
- If there are clear differences in participants, restate them and ask participants: Is the restatement accurate? What do you need to learn to understand the difference?
What information could the group bring to the discussion to gain new insight on these differences?

- Don’t repeat language that might raise defenses on the other side, but rephrase or reframe “toxic” comments.
- Help participants identify common ground but don’t force consensus.
- Boomerang questions back to the group rather than answering them.
- Help the group assess its progress.
- Maintain a positive attitude.
- Specify the time frame to talk in round robins. Help people monitor their airtime.
- Remind participants to express their feelings with “I” statements (I feel uncomfortable, I feel disrespected, I feel frustrated) if they have emotional reactions to the discussion.
- Be transparent about the facilitator’s role. If facilitators are experiencing difficulty in focusing the group or if ground rules are being ignored, they should be clear about what is happening.
  
  I’m having a hard time helping you stay focused. What can you do to stay with the topic we’re discussing? You’re starting to debate each other rather than trying to learn more about why you hold these views. How can I help you stick with the dialogue process?

- Offer process suggestions and checks them out with the group.
  
The group seems to have shifted its focus. My suggestion is that we go back to the original topic and then reserve time to look at the new one. Does this work for you?

- Be flexible in adhering to ground rules if the group dynamic warrants flexibility, e.g., an emotional or angry moment that brings deeper understanding, a digression that produces insight and understanding.

- Be creative in how the group discusses issues. Try these alternatives to a whole group discussion. They maximize participation.

  **Pairs.** Have groups divide into pairs of Palestinian/Arab/Jew and in turn, ask each to tell his/her perspective on the issue. Pairs can also be used to have participants take on the perspectives of the “other side.”

  **Fishbowl.** Have a pair of participants discuss their perspectives on an issue with the rest of the group listening. Debrief discussion by first asking the pair about their areas of agreement and disagreement. Then ask the rest of the group to respond.

  **Small Groups.** Divide the larger group into groups of four and ask them to talk about their perspectives on the agreed upon issue.

- Debrief every session with key questions.
  
  What were the strong points of today’s session?
  What did you hear that surprised or changed how you think about the issues?
  What was hard for you?
- Set an agenda for the next meeting. Settle details about where and when.
  
  What do you want to talk about during the next meeting?
  Will it require some background preparation or reading?
  If so, what do you want to read? How can people obtain copies of the article?

**Tools for Dealing with Strong Emotions**

- Use active listening. Acknowledge the feelings of the speaker.
- If the participant is offensive, call for a break. Speak with the person privately and acknowledge the strong emotions. Ask what the person needs to continue to participate and follow the ground rules.
• Ask the other group members if they are feeling criticized or if they can continue to listen with an open mind and heart. Use their responses as a guide to helping the speaker reframe his/her comments.
• Remind participants about the ground rules about speaking with respect and ask the participant if he/she can talk about the subject in that way
• Model how the statement can be reframed in a non-threatening way
• Check in with the participant after the meeting
• If verbal attacks continue, do a reality check on whether the person is able or wants to continue with the group

Formulating Questions
Framing questions is an important part of facilitating dialogue. It is key to the inquiry process. Generally, open-ended questions (questions that cannot be answered by yes or no) are the most useful in deepening the discussion. Facilitators need to pay attention to how the discussion develops and make suggestions about what to examine, framing the questions for the group to help them advance the discussion. Examples of questions have been provided throughout the guide. Below are some additional examples of questions that can be used to structure the dialogue discussions. These have been adapted from the Public Conversations Project.
• Talk about your life experience or current situation that will help the group understand your views and concerns about the Israeli/Palestinian conflict.
• What are your views, hopes and fears regarding the conflict? What is the heart of the matter for you?
• What are the polarizing dynamics of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict? What needs to change if we are to deal with the differences?
• Have you experienced any mixed feelings, value conflicts, and areas of confusion or uncertainty about the conflict?
• What experience or credible information might alter your views, hopes and concerns?
• What are the questions we need to ask ourselves about this conflict, as individuals, as members of various groups and organizations, and as citizens? Why do you think these questions are important?
• What questions could provide you a constructive focus for conversations you want to have with immediate family and friends? With neighbors and colleagues? Activists and politicians?
• What strains or tensions in your local community are of concern to you at this point? How do you think these divisions will be affected by unfolding events in the Middle East?
• Where do you see the strongest need for dialogue in your community?

STRUCTURING ISSUES DIALOGUE AND DELIBERATION

Many dialogue groups report difficulty in talking about the political issues that are fundamental to the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. After sharing personal narratives and building trust, people want to move to discussions about issues. However, some groups avoid these discussions because they can rapidly turn into debates in which participants attempt to persuade others of the rightness of their positions. Listening and learning are often abandoned as discussions become polarized.

By suspending judgment and engaging in a process of deliberation and collaborative learning, participants can discuss their perspectives in ways that foster mutual understanding and new
learnings. After dialogue groups have built trust among participants and know and respect each other’s identities and personal narratives, they are prepared to engage in discussions about the tough issues.

Deliberation on critical issues can lead to a transformation of perspectives. It can also lead to some type of action on the part of group members. When people begin to see commonality instead of difference, agreement rather than discord, they often want to take that agreement to action. The next section will address this issue.

**STEPS FOR STRUCTURING DIALOGUE ON SUBSTANTIVE ISSUES**

**Step 1: Identify an issue for discussion.** Agree on an issue that the group will discuss. The group might brainstorm a list of critical issues and prioritize them. Select the top two or three issues and schedule them for discussion over an agreed upon time period.

**Step 2: Express perspectives on issue.** When an issue is identified, give all participants an opportunity to express their views about the issue, using a round robin/talking circle format. Encourage participants to talk from personal experiences, beliefs, and knowledge.

**Step 3: Identify new learnings or perspectives.** Participants should practice listening without judgment to the perspectives offered by others and paraphrasing them to check for understanding. It may be useful to have participants write down the essentials of the perspective presented. If you use this approach, have people re-read what they have written, having them check or underline what they can affirm, believe, or agree with. Participants can also identify what they heard from each other’s remarks that was different from their previous understanding of the issue.

As a result of what you have heard, do you have any uncertainties about the views you have held? How do they relate to this discussion?

What experience or information might alter your views or perspectives?

What surprises helped you break through stereotypes or exaggerated assumptions?

**Step 4: Identify differences and commonalities.** Identify points of commonality and difference among the views expressed. Facilitators might want to keep a record of these comments on chart paper or take notes and distribute them to participants. Facilitators should identify areas of agreement, disagreement, and areas about which people are confused or need more information. Ask students to quickly jot down the essentials of the perspective presented. As they re-read what they have written, ask students to check or underline what they can affirm, believe, or agree with.

**Step 5: Engage in collaborative learning.** Facilitators should ask how can participants can share additional information that will shed light on the differences, clarify questions, and gain understanding about the differences. Groups can agree to read articles or books, view films, bring in speakers. The group can identify what they want to learn, what joint learning activities they will engage in and agree on a time line for doing.

- Engage in inquiry into the differences.
- Ask people to explain the “other side” to check for mutual understanding of the issues.
• Participants should be able to articulate the full range of views about the issue that have surfaced.
• Explore the values, principles, and interpretations of history and current events that underlie the different perspectives.
• Ask participants to examine doubts, difficulties or weakness in their perspectives or positions.
• Examine how narratives or arguments can be distorted or manipulated. Ask questions like:
  What information might have been omitted or distorted?
  Have people been scapegoated? If so, how?
  Has blame been inappropriately assigned? What underlies the blame?
  Have events in the past been interpreted through present-day perspectives? What are the risks of this approach?

Step 6: Reassess areas of agreement and disagreement. With new knowledge, participants may find increased commonality on issues or interpretations of history. Check to see where there is still uncertainty, lack of understanding, or ambiguity.
• Ask if there is a way those differences could be bridged.
• Explore areas of agreement and commonality.
• Ask if participants want to act on any of these areas together.

Alternative Approach to Issues Dialogue

Groups might want to structure their sessions from a temporal framework, looking at the past, the present, and imagining a future, as follows:

Focus on the Past
What are the different Israeli/Palestinian narratives?
Why are they so different?
What would it take to understand the others’ narrative?
• Examine parallel narratives (see Dialogue of Two Monologues in Appendix); validate different perspectives. Areas of discussion might include:
  o Historical narratives of Jews and Palestinians
  o Zionism
  o Arab nationalism
  o The Holocaust and anti-Semitism
  o UN Partition of 1947
  o Perspectives on 1948, including the Nakba and Israeli’s war of independence
  o 1967 War
  o Refugees
  o The Occupation of the West Bank and Gaza
  o Human rights issues
  o Oslo Peace Accords and Camp David
• Identify points of difference and commonality.
  What are your concerns about the views and facts presented? What are the underlying positions and values?
How do the values, assumptions and opinions conflict or match with your own?

- Engage in collaborative learning about the narratives, using historic documents, books, articles, films, speakers.
- Acknowledge new learnings, deepen understanding of differences, allow for changes in perspectives.

Focus on the Present

How does each side view the current situation?
What would it take to understand the situation from the other’s perspective?
What are the human costs for both sides of the current situation?

- Examine different perspectives on the current situation. Topics for discussion might include
  - The status of the settlements
  - By-pass roads
  - Suicide attacks
  - Hamas, Islamic Jihad
  - Jewish fundamentalism
  - Christian Zionists
  - The separation wall
  - Security issues
  - The Road Map
  - Targeted assassinations
  - The Geneva Accords
  - The People’s Voice (Nusseibeh/Ayalon peace principles)

- Identify points of difference and commonality
- Engage in collaborative learning about areas of difference through personal accounts, documents, articles, polling results, publications of Israeli and Palestinian organizations, etc.
- Examine options for changing the status quo.

Focus on the Future

What is your vision of the future of Israeli/Palestinian relations?
What would it take to get there?
What would it take to achieve a just two state solution?
What would a viable Palestinian state look like?
What might be a vision for a one state solution?
What would it take to achieve it?
What will it take to change the climate of animosity and despair?

- Examine options for the future.
- Identify the interests of both peoples.
- Explore what justice and security means for both peoples.
- Study the current peace proposals (the Road Map, the Geneva agreements, the People’s Voice) that have emerged.
- Discuss the critical issues at stake in peace negotiations.
  - Borders
  - Settlements
  - Water resources
  - Security
• Status of Palestinian refugees
• Jerusalem

• Explore one and two state solutions.
• Explore the obstacles to implementing any of the proposals. What needs to happen to implement any of the peace proposals? What can the Israelis do? The Palestinians? The United States? The UN? The European Union?
• Examine the advantages and disadvantages of different scenarios.
• Create a joint vision for peace.
• Consider group actions. If group wants to engage in action, identify actions that they can take despite their differences.

## DIALOGUE AND ACTION

Many Arab/Jewish dialogue groups report that a major challenge is the tension that exists between dialogue and action. Some groups are divided because some members want to engage in political action while others don’t. Some say that the dialogue process itself is the action while other participants say that dialogue is necessary but not sufficient to engage them in the process. There is a sense of urgency among many participants to act because of the terrible events taking place daily in Israel/Palestine and because of the frustrations surrounding failed peace efforts. Another concern related to discussing the issues is that people feel powerless to do anything about them. Some feel that people in a living room dialogue are engaging in an academic exercise because only Israelis and Palestinians are in a position to resolve the conflict.

Some groups have resolved this issue by splitting into separate dialogue and action groups. Others have evolved from dialogue to action groups, while groups have derailed because of the tension between dialogue and action.

Some groups feel compelled to initiate public education activities when they reach common understandings and perspectives. Action is often a compelling next step after sustained dialogue, and indeed, many dialogue and deliberation processes lead to collective action. Both the National Issues Forum and the sustained dialogue process developed by Harold Sauders of the Kettering Foundation incorporate the development of scenarios to take into the political arena.

Action for some Arab/Palestinian/Jewish dialogue groups has meant public education, motivated by the desire to help community members understand the issues, address some of the divisions in the Jewish and Palestinian or Muslim communities about the issues, or demonstrate that Palestinians and Jews can come together and achieve mutual understanding. Toward this end, groups have held film festivals, sponsored speakers, demonstrated the dialogue process to various community groups and faith communities, and started youth dialogue programs. Other groups have initiated more political actions, such as lobbying congressional representatives, publishing statements in the press, and participated in direct action demonstrations.

Groups should have neither the expectation nor the prohibition of collective action. What is of critical importance is that groups negotiate the types of actions they want to pursue. The
following guidelines will help groups avoid unnecessary divisions or acrimony about making action decisions.

Guidelines for action
1. Use consensus decision making for any collective group action. Consensus does not mean that all members are equally enthusiastic about a decision. Consensus can be reached with participants giving different levels of support, from enthusiastic to reserved support.
2. If some members of the group want to transition from dialogue to action, brainstorm the types of actions that the group might take. This could range from a public education session to some type of collective political action. Review the list and identify which actions are supported by the entire group. Get clarify about the action and how the group will be represented.
3. If some participants want to participate in political action but others don’t, groups can decide to take individual actions without using the group’s name.
4. If it important for the group to show solidarity and act collectively, negotiate groups actions that meet the interests of the whole group.

Endnotes
5. The format of the sample agendas on pp.10-14 is drawn with permission from materials developed by the Public Conversations Project, whose guide to community dialogue, “Constructive Conversations about Challenging Times,” can be found on their website, www.publicconversations.org. See also the Public Dialogue Consortium, www.publicdialogue.org.

“The peacemaker is a bridge walked on by both sides. You can either make peace or get the credit for it. But you cannot do both.”
- David Augsburger, Conflict Mediation Across Cultures
APPENDIX

Organizations

The Center for Deliberative Democracy, Web: www.cdd.stanford.edu

The Compassionate Listening Project, P.O. Box 17, Indianola, WA 98342
(360) 297-2280. FAX (360) 297-6563. Email: office@compassionatelistening.org.
Web: www.compassionatelistening.org

Jewish Palestinian Living Room Dialogue Group, 1448 Cedarwood Drive, San Mateo, CA 94403.
(650) 574-8303. Email: Ltraubman@igc.org. Web: www.traubman.igc.org


Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions, P.O. Box 2030, 7 Ben Yehuda St., Jerusalem, Israel
91020 Email: info@icahd.org Web: www.icahd.org

Mid East Web, Email mew@mideastweb.org. Web: www.mideastweb.org

National Association for Community Mediation, 1527 New Hampshire NW, Suite 400,
Washington, D.C. 20005. (202) 667-9513. Email: nafc@nafc.org

National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation, P.O. Box 402, Brattleboro, VT 05302 USA.
802-254-7341. Web: www.thataway.org

National Issues Forum, Web: www.nifi.org

Public Conversations Project, 46 Kondazian Street, Watertown, MA 02472.
Email: info@publicconversations.org. Web: www.publicconversations.org.

Public Dialogue Consortium, 807 Wharfside Road, San Mateo, CA 94404
(650) 574-7343. Email: Kimberly Pearce, kim@publicdialogue.org

Study Circles Resource Center, P.O. Box 203, Pomfret, CT 06258
(860) 928-2616. Email: scrc@neca.com

Givat Haviva/Jewish Arab Center for Peace, M.P Menashe 37850, Israel. 972-04-6309266. Cell:
972-0-64-475437. Fax: 972-04-6309305. Email: dovergh@inter.net.it
Web: www.dialogate.or.il

Israel Palestine Center for Research and Information, P.O. Box 9321, Jerusalem 91092
Phone: 972-2-676-9460. Fax: 972-2-676-8022. Email: gershon@ipcri.org; law@ipcri.org
Web: www.ipcri.org
There are legions of books and articles on the conflict. Below is a sampling from prominent authors from different perspectives. There are also several books on peace building. For reviews or readers’ reactions, check the web or Amazon.com reviews.


Black, Eric, *Parallel Realities, A Jewish/Arab History of Israel/Palestine*, Paradigm Press, Minneapolis, 1992


Flapan, Simcha, *The Birth of Israel: Myths and Realities*, Pantheon, 1987


Films
There are a number of films that can serve as triggers for dialogue and deeper discussion about the issues. Most films promote a particular perspective, so part of the exercise is analyzing the messages that the film is conveying. Below are some recommendations.


Children of Abraham, Mid-East Citizen Diplomacy, (360) 297-2280, www.mideastdiplomacy.org


Frontline: Battle for the Holy Land, PBS

Frontline: Shattered Dreams, PBS


If You Make It Possible, Lynn Feinerman, www.arabfilm.com. Arab Film Distribution 10035 35th Ave NE Seattle, WA 98125 (206) 322-0882

Jerusalem: An Occupation Set in Stone?, Marty Rosenbluth, 1995, Arab Film Distribution

500 Dunam on the Moon, Rachael Leah Jones, Arab Film Distribution

Oasis of Peace, Jocelyn Ajami, www.arabfilm.com Arab Film Distribution 10035 35th Ave NE Seattle, WA 98125 (206) 322-0882


Promises, Justin Shapiro, B.Z. Goldberg, www.promisesproject.org

Relentless, www.honestreporting.com

The Settlers, RuthWalk, Icarus Films, 1-800-876-1710 www.frif.com
**Dialogue in Two Monologues by Eric Black**

*Eric Black, in his excellent book, Parallel Realities, A Jewish/Arab History of Israel/Palestine, Paradigm Press, 1992, presents the Israeli and Palestinian narratives as two separate and parallel realities. He provides two monologues that represent the two distinct versions or perspectives of each side. A small portion of this presentation is provided below with his permission.*

Readers are encouraged to look at the complete text of this chapter, which can be found on the Public Broadcasting System web site at [http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/oslo/](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/oslo/).

*Parallel Realities* is available for $9.95 per copy plus $2.00 shipping/handling for up to 10 copies. Orders should be sent to Eric Black/Star Tribune/425 Portland Ave., Minneapolis, MN 55488. There are discounts available for classroom orders of 10 or more (15 percent) and 30 or more (25 percent). Details or inquiries can be directed to the same address, or to eblack@startribune.com.

This material could be used to structure a discussion about the different narratives and perspectives of the conflict.

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**Israeli**

Thousands of years ago, the Jews lived and ruled in the land that God had promised them, the only country they ever had, the place where King Solomon built the Temple that is the holiest site in Judaism. David Ben-Gurion, founding prime minister of Israel, said: "Jerusalem has been the Jewish capital for 3,000 years since King David. Jerusalem is more Jewish than Paris is French or London is English."

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**Palestinian**

The modern Palestinians descend from the ancient Canaanites and Philistines who inhabited the Palestine region before, during and after the relatively brief era of the Jewish kingdom there. Palestinian historian Sami Hadawi called the connection of the ancient Israelites with Palestine "short-lived, unstable, intermittent, long extinct, based on nothing better than the right of conquest."

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**Israeli**

After a series of oppressions by a succession of empires, most of the Jews were evicted from their homeland by the Romans and spent two millennia scattered in foreign lands. During these millennia there was always a Jewish presence in the homeland and the
rest of world Jewry retained its special relationship and claim to the land by keeping alive
the dream of someday returning, symbolized by the traditional Passover toast: "Next year in
Jerusalem."

Palestinian/In the seventh century a.d., shortly
after the death of the Prophet Mohammed,
Muslim crusaders from the Arab peninsula
conquered Palestine. The local population
converted to Islam and became assimilated into
Arab culture. For the next 13 centuries, Palestine
was inhabited by a predominantly Arab Muslim
population. No conquest, no U.N. resolution, no
Israeli policy can invalidate the justice and
morality of the claim of that population to that
land.

According to Muslim tradition, Mohammed
ascended to heaven from Jerusalem to receive a
divine revelation. The Dome of the Rock
commemorates this miracle, making Jerusalem
the third holiest Muslim city and establishing for
Islam a strong religious claim to the Holy City.

About the Author

Eric Black is a reporter for the Minneapolis Star Tribune, where he specializes in pieces that put
the news in historical context. Parallel Realities is based on a series of articles he wrote for the
newspaper. The book describes the history of Israel/Palestine, from biblical times until just
before Oslo, from the perspectives of each side of the ethnoreligious divide.