

“People Talking About Palestine & Israel” - A Format for Mass Dialogue Groups

Concept

Expand the idea of “dialogue group” beyond a handful of individuals in someone’s living room to groups of 20, 30 or even 50 people joined together to listen to each other matters which have deep meaning to them. In this case it is about issues of Palestine and Israel. This is an opportunity for people to be introduced to and speak with Palestinians - for many this may be for the first time in their life. Having Palestinians participate in dialogue adds a needed dimension for many and gives them greater stake and meaning to dialogue.

Purpose

To create a safe and open environment where participants can share their deepest fears and hopes. Individuals are often silent and afraid to speak out about topics and areas where there is discord and contention. They may fear inadequacy, animosity, ridicule, or ostracization. One such area which strikes at the core for many be they Jewish, Palestinian or Canadian is Israel and Palestine. The individual heart and soul must be addressed if there is to be true progress.

Rationale

Everyday, ordinary people want to speak and hear other “ordinary” people be they Jews or Palestinians or other. The days of talking heads and experts are over, particularly on issues of heartfelt and human conflict. People are tired of spin and official party lines; they need to have their say and hear what others have to say in plain, honest, everyday language. It is only through human, face-to-face dialogue that a meeting of the heart can take place and create the possibility for compassionate listening.

How it works

Invite a group of acquaintances or have a formal group invite members or advertise a totally open event to a session “People Talking”. Through a structured and yet flexible forum create conditions for “safe” and “open” dialogue on specific questions or aspects of Palestine and Israel. No interrupting, no negating, just listening and putting one’s questions and perspectives respectfully to the group.

Program Flow

- Agenda Objectives
- Intro facilitators
- Opening circle
- Ground rules for participation
- Exercise: Up/Down
- Exercise: Identify issues, topics & questions; and vote on discussion topic
- Exercise: Listening Pairs
- Exercise: Samoan Circle or similar talking stick idea (open to all)
- Exercise: Listening Pairs (debrief on the Samoan Circle or own thoughts)
- Plenum & Summary
- Discussion of Next Steps

Survey or response form available & future contact sheet.

Summary

The time is now to take dialogue to larger groups of people. In a world of fragmented communication and few opportunities for true human dialogue, it is more essential than ever that people get to speak their fears and hopes to others and to hear that they are not alone.