

"The dialogue is not only a physical conversation of two people but also an attitude of soul – a certain ontological mystery, hidden from the others ... mysterious communication of one person's world with that of the other person."

– Buber Martin

"... in dialogue a person participates wholly and throughout his whole life: with his eyes, lips, hands, soul, spirit, with his whole body."

– Mikhail Bakhtin

"... even one person can have a sense of dialogue within himself, if the spirit of the dialogue is present. The picture or image that this derivation suggests is of a stream of meaning flowing among and through us and between us. This will make possible a flow of meaning in the whole group, out of which may emerge some new understanding. It's something new, which may not have been in the starting point at all... And this shared meaning is the 'glue' or 'cement' that holds people and societies together."

— David Bohm



DIALOGUE

Introduction for Practitioners

Sadhu Ram Tamang



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Dialogue : Introduction for Practitioners

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Preface



Welcome to the world of dialogue—a guide through the nuances of meaningful conversation. In a society shaped by diverse perspectives, effective communication is not just a skill but a necessity for fostering understanding, tolerance, and collaboration.

Explore the essence of dialogue in “Introduction of Dialogue” and discover the myriad benefits in “Why Dialogue?” For those eager to apply the method, “How to Start a Dialogue” provides practical insights, overcoming barriers to meaningful exchanges. “Principles and Values in Dialogue” emphasizes the moral compass guiding respectful and empathetic conversations.

“Dialogue Discourse” dissects the structure, dynamics, and challenges, equipping readers with tools for graceful navigation. Enrich your understanding with our curated “References” offering diverse perspectives and avenues for further learning.

Whether you’re a seasoned communicator or seeking to enhance your skills, this booklet is your valuable companion. May it inspire and empower you to engage in meaningful dialogues that transcend boundaries.

Happy reading and, more importantly, happy dialoguing!

Stephanie Theis,
Program Coordinator, GIZ Civil Peace Service Program.



Author's Telescope



Dialogue as a tool for peacebuilding has been widely used in the post-conflict context of Nepal. Different organizations have implemented this adoptive methodology following a needs-based approach in various settings.

Dialogue is often connected with mediation and negotiation, but the implementation of the method is uniquely distinct. There is a clear distinction between the facilitating approaches of public dialogue and conflict based dialogue.

The formation of a working group on dialogue among members of the Civil Peace Service consortium led to the establishment of the Nepal Dialogues Initiative. In 2021, like-minded practitioners and organizations created this loose network with regular meetings and workshops. The author is an active member of this initiative.

This Initiative was instrumental to bring dialogue practitioners and organizations together to organize the Nepal Dialogue Summit 2022 and Nepal Dialogue Summit 2023, with the presence of international peace icons.

The Initiative aims to institutionalize and promote dialogue culture in Nepal at the individual, family, national and international level. It advocates for the formation of the Dialogue Council in



Dialogue Summit 2022 and Dialogue Summit 2023 held with the presence of international peace icons in Nepal



“Dialogue is a free flow of meaning between people in communication, in the sense of a stream that flows between banks.”

– David Bohm

Nepal. It also aims to create a strong and unified voice to establish the discourse on dialogue in all levels, including government, bureaucracy, media, academics, and civil society organizations. The goal is to promote dialogue philosophy in building sustainable peace in all spheres of life. The author believes that this book will add value to this initiative.

I am grateful to the members of Nepal Dialogues Initiative for shaping the concepts of this book. Special thanks are extended to GIZ-CPS colleagues, exceptionally Eva Gaderer, Michael Hendrik de Wilde and Stephanie Theis for providing invaluable feedback to create this publication.

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**“...in dialogue, the intention is
not to advocate but to inquire;
not to argue but to explore;
not to convince but to discover.”**

– Louise Diamond

Introduction of Dialogue

1

A dialogue (in Nepali *samwad*) is a conversation between actors that puts any hierarchy aside to deeply understand one another. It is a method of looking into the causes of the various challenges that affect humanity. It makes it possible to investigate and comprehend the kinds of interactions that obstruct genuine communication between people, families, communities, and countries. People communicate with one another in a variety of ways, including singing, dancing, and playing together without much difficulties which is possible due to our capacity for dialogue on the issues that are most important to us.

Dialogue is a way of creating meaning for a group of individuals that can examine their individual and shared assumptions, concepts, worldviews, and emotions (Bhom, et.al, 1991).

Similarly, dialogue may also be defined as a sustained, communal investigation into the principles, presumptions, and truths that underlie everyday experience. (Isaacs, 1999).

Through dialogue, we can mutually observe how our actions can be impacted by latent beliefs and intentions as well as how unnoticed cultural differences can clash without our awareness.

There is also a perspective that dialogue is not a process or a series of steps. Rather, it is a product of ongoing communication and relationships (Kent & Taylor, 2002).



A dialogue is a conversation between parties that puts any hierarchy aside to deeply understand one another.

2

Why Dialogue?



“dia”
which means
“through”
and
“logos” which
means the
“word”, or
more
particularly
“the meaning
of the word”

The purpose of dialogue is to provide a space for sharing thoughts and meaning, and it results in a collective new meaning of the content of the thought and dynamic structures that govern it (Bohm, et. al., 1991).

Each listener can provide a view of some of the presumptions and unstated implications of both what is being said and what is not being said to each speaker and the other members of the group. It gives each participant the chance to reflect on the assumptions, biases, and personality traits that underlie their ideas, opinions, beliefs, and feelings, as well as the roles they frequently assume.

The word “dialogue” derives from two roots: “dia” which means “through” and “logos” which means the “word”, or more particularly, “the meaning of the word” (Bohm, 2003).

For the expression of ideas and feelings that are typically kept buried, trust building is a core principle. This expression happens when group members’ trust in one another and the trust in the process grows (Bohm, et al., 1991).

The dialogue has three phases which is an integral part of the dialogue for its sustainability and long term impact. They are:

- a. Pre-dialogue
- b. Dialogue, and
- c. Post-dialogue

Similarly, the United Nations General Assembly, by its resolutions 53/22, decided to proclaim the year 2001 as the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations, and invited Governments, the United Nations systems, and others to plan and implement appropriate cultural, educational and social programmes to promote the concept of dialogue among civilizations¹.

Table: Understanding Debate and Dialogue

Debate	Dialogue
● Win	● Understand
● Convince	● Explain
● Argue	● Listen
● Look for the weak argument	● Look for the strength in the other
● Hunter	● Self-discipline
● Moral Judge	● Tolerance
● Make opponent insecure	● Make the other feel safe
● To change opinion is a sign of weakness	● To change opinion is a sign of maturity
● Confronting language	● Supportive language

Source: Steinar Bryn, Nansen Center for Peace and Dialogue

1. <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/359173?ln=env>

3

How to start a Dialogue?

The key elements to establish the start of a dialogue are the capacity to suspend assumptions, the number of dialogue members, the duration of the dialogue, leadership, and the subject matter.



Suspension of Assumptions

Suspension of thoughts, impulse, judgments, etc., lies at the very heart of dialogue. It is one of the most important unique elements. Suspension means being open to pay attention, to listen and look and is essential to sincere exploration. The actual process of exploration takes place during listening – not only to others but to oneself. Suspension involves exposing your reactions, impulses, feelings and opinions in such a way that they can be seen and felt within your own psyche and also be reflected back by others in the group (Bohm, et. al., 1991).



Participation

A dialogue works best with between twenty and forty people seated facing one another in a single circle. Two concentric circles can be required to seat everybody so that they can see and hear one another (Bohm, et. al., 1991).

Duration

In setting up dialogues it is useful at the start to agree on the length of the session and for someone to take responsibility for calling time at the end. They have found that about two hours is optimum. Weekends have often been used to allow a sequence of sessions, but if the dialogue is to continue for an extended period of time, they suggest that there be at least a one-week interval between each succeeding session to allow time for individual reflection and further thinking (Bohm, et. al., 1991).

There is no limit to how long a dialogue group may continue its exploration. But it would be contrary to the spirit of dialogue for it to become institutionalized.

Leadership

A dialogue is essentially a conversation between equals. Hierarchy has no place in dialogue.

Nevertheless, in the early stages some guidance can be required to help the participants realize the subtle differences between dialogue and other forms of group process. At least one or, preferably two, experienced facilitators can support this. Facilitators are participants just like everybody else.

Subject Matter

The dialogue can begin with any topic of interest to the participants. If some members of the group feel that certain exchanges or subjects are disturbing or not fitting, it is important that they express these thoughts.

The dialogues are basically categorized base on issues as conflict-based dialogues and public dialogues. It has distinct working procedures and approaches are distinctly different from each other.



4

Principles in Dialogue

Isaacs (1999) states basic principles of dialogues are active listening, suspending assumptions, no judgement, and voicing.



Values in Dialogue

5

In a dialogue, several values play a crucial role in creating a productive and respectful exchange of ideas. These values shape the atmosphere and guide the participants towards mutual understanding and cooperation. Here are some key values in a dialogue:

Respect

respect is fundamental in a dialogue. It involves recognizing the inherent worth, dignity, and autonomy of each participant. Respecting others' perspectives, experiences, and emotions creates a safe and inclusive environment where open communication can thrive.



Open-mindedness

Open-mindedness entails being receptive to different viewpoints, ideas, and perspectives. It involves setting aside preconceived notions, biases, and prejudices to genuinely consider and understand alternative perspectives. Open-mindedness promotes intellectual growth and encourages participants to expand their horizons.





Empathy

Empathy is the ability to understand and share the feelings and experiences of others. In a dialogue, empathy enables participants to listen attentively, acknowledge diverse emotions, and show compassion towards others' viewpoints. It fosters a sense of connection and promotes a deeper understanding of one another.



Active listening

Active listening is a crucial value in dialogue. It involves giving full attention to the speaker, seeking to understand their message and perspective. Active listening requires patience, focus, and a genuine desire to comprehend others' viewpoints. It helps build trust, encourages authentic exchange, and minimizes miscommunication.



Authenticity

Authenticity involves expressing oneself honestly and genuinely in a dialogue. Participants are encouraged to share their thoughts, feelings, and experiences openly, without pretense or manipulation. Authenticity fosters trust, vulnerability, and deeper connections between participants.



Humility

Humility involves recognizing the limits of one's knowledge and being open to learning from others. It requires acknowledging that one's own perspective may be incomplete or flawed and being willing to engage in a collaborative search for truth and understanding. Humility encourages intellectual humility and promotes a sense of equality among participants.

Constructive Criticism

Constructive criticism involves offering feedback and challenging ideas in a respectful and productive manner. It focuses on the content of the argument rather than attacking the person making the argument. Constructive criticism helps refine ideas, identify weaknesses, and foster intellectual growth in a dialogue.



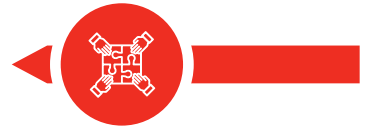
Patience

Patience is essential in a dialogue, especially when dealing with complex or sensitive topics. It involves allowing sufficient time for participants to express their thoughts, emotions, and perspectives fully. Patience also means giving space for reflection, acknowledging that understanding and consensus may take time to develop.



Cooperation

Cooperation involves a willingness to work together towards shared goals in a dialogue. It emphasizes collaboration, seeking common ground, and finding mutually acceptable solutions. Cooperation encourages participants to build on each other's ideas and create a constructive dialogue environment.



These values contribute to the overall quality of a dialogue, enabling participants to engage in meaningful and respectful conversations, foster understanding, and promote the pursuit of truth and mutual growth.

Guidelines on Dialogue

- Suspend assumptions
- Listen to your listener
- Be aware of thought
- Observe the observer
- Slow down the inquiry
- Befriend polarization.

– Source: Isaacs, 1993

Figure: Dialogue Model*



*Dialogue model used by GIZ Civil Peace Service while working with inter-religious leaders in Nepal

16 Resource Books on Dialogue



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dialogue has to go into all the pressures that are behind our assumptions. It goes into the process of thought behind the assumptions, not just the assumptions themselves.
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