**Introduction to Dialogue**

***The goal of dialogue*** is to discover unity, oneness, one heart/soul/mind, participatory or collective thought. Collectively find “coherent meaning.”

***The exercise*** is learning to hold the thoughts, feelings, opinions, and experiences of others. Hold, hold, hold … take a breath and hold some more without judging, that is, without deciding that what you’ve heard is good or bad, whether you agree or disagree, and not analyze it. Just hold it. This is the exercise.

Here’s how we do the exercise.

1. In a group of 5 people or so, one person will share their thoughts, feelings, opinions, or experiences of one of the selected topics. ***The person who shares selects their topic. It can be any of the six topics***.
2. As the person shares, the other members of the group remain mindful to keep a safe space for the person who is sharing. They do that primarily with their attentiveness and their body language – smiles not frowns, gentle nods from time to time not eye rolls, etc.
3. After the person shares, anyone in the group may ask them to say more about something the person said. Whoever asks the question, and it can be anyone in the group, wants to focus on something that seemed important ***to the person who was sharing*** (avoid “leading” questions). Often this will be one of the last things they said but not always.
   1. For example, the question could be: “I heard you say you have concerns about the warming of the planet, could you please say more about those concerns, or could you add to that a bit?”
   2. After the person responds, anyone else in the group may ask another such question.
   3. The goal of these questions is to help the person express what is important to them.
   4. We are not “drilling down” like we do in pure listening. The goal is not that the person feels ***fully*** heard as in a listening exercise. We do want the person to feel that they have been heard to the degree they have shared, but we’re not trying to get to their “deep meaning” like we would be doing in a one-on-one listening experience.
4. When the person who is sharing feels they have said what they wanted to say, they say, “I’m through for now.”
5. Then another person in the group shares their thoughts, feelings, opinions, or experiences about the ***topic of their choice***. ***They choose from any of the six topics***. There is no expectation that it would be the same topic as the first person.
6. The exercise then continues as with the first person.
7. Generally, each person would complete their sharing and response to questions in 10 minutes or less.
8. After two people have shared, the group will debrief the experience. Everyone is invited to participate in the debrief:
   1. What did you notice?
   2. How did you feel?
   3. What did it feel like to attempt to hold what you were hearing without judging it?
   4. What did you think?
9. Then we will return to the whole room and debrief our experiences.
10. The goal of this exercise is not to explore one of the topics.
11. The goal is not for anyone to say everything they think about a topic.
12. This exercise is not a listening exercise, though the listening skills we have learned are very apropos, especially the absence of thought or the setting aside of one’s thoughts.
13. This exercise is not a discussion or a debate.
14. The exercise is an *introduction* to dialogue. The goal of the exercise is to hold the thoughts, feelings, opinions, experiences of others without evaluating or judging them. As you do the exercise, keep this in mind. Share how it went for you in the debrief.
15. This exercise is an introduction to dialogue, and the goal of dialogue is to discover unity, to experience participatory or collective thought, to find coherent meaning.