

A Primer on Dialogue

Each and every year that SEED has presented the Language of Spirit dialogue, we get a flood of wonderful feedback. Generally, about 80-90% of the people love the proceedings, and for about a third of these people the dialogue is experienced as so profound that it literally changes their life. After the dialogue, people have been moved to literally move to this state, even apprenticed with some of the speakers, and completely restructured their life from the ideas they have heard. Others begin or deepen an avocational or academic pursuit of Native American ideas, ideas of consciousness, new science and spirituality. However, many of these same people that are so enriched by the dialogue do experience some discomfort or frustration along the way. About 5 - 10% of the people come away feeling confused and frustrated, and one or two people sometimes can barely contain their anger even amidst the recognition that others are enjoying themselves.

This primer is intended for all attendees and new inner circle people – but especially for those that have or may experience frustration... so that any frustration that is experienced can be understood and somewhat mitigated as the person moves through the process.

Dialogue, as Leroy Little Bear says, is like ceremony. It is not an easy process nor is it intended to be. In ceremony, people will often dance all day without food or water. One of the purposes of ceremony is to release a person from their normal way of perceiving the world, so that spirit can enter. When one remains comfortable in their own way of being, it is less likely that their consciousness will change.

This is why Leroy doesn't allow for a lot of breaks – or stretching... or small dialogue groups...or any of that, once we begin. These devices all have their purposes, and in fact, we do utilize them in pre-conference events and the preliminary talks – but once we come to the dialogue circle moderated by Leroy, the purpose is to come to one mind...and not anything else. Everything is done consciously for that purpose and that purpose alone. The breaks that we do take are generally extended breaks....breaks for the entire evening, or for sleeping and dreaming. In sleeping and dreaming, these are times when conscious thought is also suspended, and a greater knowing becomes possible.

Please go into the dialogue with an open mind and heart. This is a special opportunity for inner circle and outer circle alike. The sharing between indigenous and non-indigenous peoples is rarely seen at the level it is in these conferences. It is normal for some of the experience to feel uncomfortable. If you are an Anglo person or non-Native and an indigenous person is speaking of the effects of colonization, or some critique and skepticism in regard to non-Native culture, you may feel attacked. You may think these atrocities happened in some past date that is over – but please consider that these experiences are still reverberating on some level. In fact, even at the present date, there

are still active forces seeking to strip native lands of their wealth of natural resources. If you are Native American and a Non-Native is speaking of a scientific construct in a way that suggests that only Western science has the answer, or perhaps she/he speaks about your cultural customs in a way that seems of superficial understanding, please be patient as well. Remember that this conference is a risk for everyone and requires everyone to overcome some feeling of discomfort. There are difficult and intimate issues involved here that are not always going to be happy.

Dialogue is about letting go of one's own "tacit infrastructure" that determines how one perceives the world. That infrastructure can include one's culture, one's language, one's political beliefs, one's perceived role in society, one's station in life. All of this determines the paradigm that we see life... and whatever paradigm a person embraces, it systematically allows in certain perceptions, while excluding others. As much as possible, whatever ideas we have need to be emptied out in order to receive new ideas and embrace new ways of knowing. As much as possible, one must cease to exist in their normal way – suspend their normal ways of thinking and knowing. Leroy has often used the example of the Zen master who meets with inquisitive scientists. He offers them tea and pours the tea so that it is overflowing from their cups onto the table. When they protest, the Zen master points out to them that their minds are like the tea cups. They can take in no new thoughts because they are already overflowing.

Dialogue is about listening deeply to what is being said. In fact, dialogue is much more about listening than speaking. Dialogue is about speaking from the heart. To speak from and through the heart, it is necessary to connect to the spirit that is moving in the room. Some people in the dialogue may speak for a long time. This is also part of the process. Those speakers are allowing spirit to move through them and there may be a lot to say. In the Native talking circle tradition, everyone is allowed to speak their full piece without being interrupted. The microphone serves as a talking stick. Nobody is on a time clock in this dialogue. We tend to move in and out of time seamlessly, and so lunch breaks and such may shift depending on the energy at the table. In dialogue, it is not always necessary to say what you want to say, because when you are thinking it, someone else may be speaking it. People who have come for years in the outer circle understand that their own thinking processes are part of the nexus of thought in the room. They know that they are participating in a profound way.

Dialogue works best with a maximum of twenty-four people in the inner circle. If there are openings in the inner circle, people in the outer circle may be invited to come join the inner circle. At some point in the process, often for an entire evening, Leroy may give the inner circle some time off to process what has occurred, and invite the outer circle to come in to dialogue in their place. This is a wonderful opportunity for those in the outer circle to join in, listen, and speak your mind; however, you may elect to take the time off to process on your own. If you are feeling like you need to express yourself orally at this time, please join. If you need the time to process, please do that instead. It is your choice.

The people who have been invited into the inner circle are invited for various reasons. We look for the best possible mix of energy. That generally means about an equal

number of indigenous and non-native people, and about an equal number of women and men. We sometimes invite famous people to join in the inner circle, but these people are most often self-selected; in that they come to us expressing an interest in coming into a dialogue circle of this type rather than us going to them. Many in the circle are invited year after year, because they are very familiar with the dialogue process and they hold the space well for others to understand what is dialogue. Some are invited because they come from a certain tradition or scientific background...but none are expected to speak from that position solely. In fact, who is speaking is not that important to us. There may not be introductions of people in the customary way. The quicker people leave behind their own resume and tacit infrastructure, the quicker we can get into the real heart of the dialogue. Dialogue is a safe place that allows people to speak in ways that others may not have been accustomed to hearing them speak before. Our hope for new inner circle people and new attendees alike is that they come with no agenda. Dialogue is ultimately about coming together to one mind...feeling the energy in one voice...uniting together with the intent of being fully present in order to access a knowing that is beyond any of our personal consciousness. It is a sometimes difficult but, if given a chance, an always rewarding process. We look forward to your attendance and participation.