

The Necessity Of Dialogue^{*}

by Mike Leterfield

The word "dialogue" derives from two roots: "dia" means "through" and "logos" comprises many overlapping semantic fields and signifies, among others, "word" and "meaning". For us the word dialogue, which is also used in music and literature, is particularly important because of its meaning of "deliberation and conversation between individuals and groups."

In a dialogue, it is as if the meaning flows in separate rivers running beside one another in their own channel. This stream has a dynamic nature; it changes and grows. At times these rivers join together in a reservoir with a communal semantic or a lake of reconciliation.

The aim of a dialogue, in spite of differences of opinion and conviction, is to gain understanding and acceptance. The word "dialogue" is therefore distinct from the word discussion. Those who engage in dialogue do not seek to defeat or silence the other person, nor do they adopt a defensive attitude at the outset. They seek to find out, to learn and to understand collectively.

Dialogue implies being amenable to another person's point of view. It requires that one pay attention and listen to another individual so that the heart and the mind might "open." This mutual acceptance makes it possible to understand each other, learn together, and make a collective contribution. A wise person once stated, this process causes an endless deepening of meaning like two mirrors that reflect each other.

Dialogue is also one of the most effective means in the struggle against negative conditioning, prejudice, and fanaticism.

Certain qualities are essential if a dialogue is to be effective, and these qualities are: sincerity, humility, and epistemic curiosity.

Sincerity

Goodwill engenders trust. Mutual trust is the most important condition for the expression of deeper thought and feelings. Openhearted people do not fear communication with or the influence of others.

Humility

One of the greatest virtues is being able to set aside oneself for the sake of others. Sincerely humble people are aware of the limits of their abilities and always back away from transgression.

Humility implies the notion that we know little and still have much to learn. It also implies the willingness to change and develop in accordance with all that we have learned.

In dialogues that are governed by humility, both sides search for the boundaries of their available knowledge and notions and, they both depart to discover unknown

places. They travel from the familiar to the unfamiliar.

Epistemic Curiosity

The nature of people enables them to be curious and search for truth. This basic drive should be a primary component of a healthy foundation for dialogue.

Together we can search for the answers to these questions among many others:

- Who are we?
- Why do we exist?
- What is our origin?
- What is the destination of our journey?
- What is our relationship to the Creator?
- What is the relationship among people, life, and the universe?
- What is the relationship between faith and science?
- How should we interpret critical thinking?
- Are their metaphysical laws, just as there are physical laws?

Most likely, the deepest desire of a person is to bequeath to subsequent generations, who will inhabit this aged earth until the end of time, something essential and of fundamental importance, thus giving to his own transiency an aspect of something that is long lasting.

Affection, virtue, compassion, fairness, and concord are universal aspects of spiritual enlightenment and happiness that will never lose their value. They are the conditions of a meaningful and blessed life and comprise the best legacy we could wish to leave others.

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