



TEN PRINCIPLES OF DIALOGUE ON ISRAEL/PALESTINE

Intro: Why engage at all?

Not everyone will want to, and that's absolutely fine so far as it goes. But many people, especially Jews, Christians and Muslims, are concerned about events in Israel and Palestine. In many cases, such involvement includes a sense of identity, family ties or religious convictions; people react to events or comments emotionally, rather than rationally.

Engaging in dialogue can be beneficial when the Israeli Palestinian situation has already begun to threaten such relations or when it becomes too pressing a subject to avoid.

The best form of 'crisis management' is crisis prevention. If there are mechanisms for 'letting off steam' already in place, things are less likely to get out of hand.

Principle 1: Don't import the conflict here

Focus on community relations in the UK – not on Israel/Palestine itself.

We can't do anything about world peace (although what happens here affects international policy and support for those in the region can be provided.)

Principle 2: Build relationships

Get to know each other across communities, groups and congregations. Before talking about the conflict, have a time to introduce dialogue partners as individual people.

Principle 3: Dialogue not debate

Debates can be great fun, but they can also polarise people, uniting factions behind champions skilled in public speaking. Debating the 'facts' of anything as contested as the Israeli/Palestinian situation can leave people feeling demoralised, dejected or worse.

Principle 4: Keep it personal

In dialogue, stick to 'I feel...' patterns. There is also no substitute for listening to 'voices from the region'; invited speakers who simply provide personal narratives can be very effective.

Principle 5: Mind your language

Even when we all use the same words, we may not understand the same things by them ('Zionist' is a good example of this.) The tone of someone's voice, if for example, contemptuous or angry, can cause resentment and hurt.

Principle 6: Advocacy or Balance?

If you have set up a meeting for people with largely similar views, or you find that your speakers are mostly in sympathy with one 'side' or the other, then concentrate on that. Don't try to inject a token speaker from the 'opposing side' in an attempt at 'balance'; it will cause more anger, or put the speaker in a very difficult position.

Principle 7: Listening not Talking

Of course, you will have to talk in order that others are listening. But it is this personal sharing that is important. People who come to dialogue meetings with prepared speeches seek to make others change without being willing to change anything in themselves.

Principle 8: Keep on track

A strong, experienced Chair or facilitator is essential. He/she should never give any indication of a personal opinion (as this can instantly lose half your audience/group), nor be afraid to keep people to time or focused on the topic.

Principle 9: Don't be afraid to shut it down

Nothing is gained by ploughing on regardless in the hopes things will improve. If the meeting/discussion/session is going badly wrong – stop it immediately. Rational argument won't accomplish anything.

Principle 10: Aim high

The meeting(s) should be looking to an outcome that involves shared activity or further discussion. It can be helpful for people to know that the event is just the beginning of a process or that something positive might come out of this, however modest.