

# **CULTIVATING COLLECTIVE CONSCIOUSNESS with Transcendent Self-presence**

## **A GUIDED DIALOGUE METHOD**

**Jean Watts, Pat Miller, PhD, & John Kloepfer, PhD**

### **Abstract**

Group Facilitators cultivate collective consciousness in a group by using a dialogue method of conversation that reconciles the inner life of mind and spirit of the participant's with their outer world of action and outcome. This requires two modes of self-reflection: introspection and transcendent self-presence. The Guided Dialogue Method is a formation process that guides participants through a progression of four interacting, but distinct levels of self-reflection: Objective -- getting the participants' attention by engaging the senses, Reflective – eliciting the participants' imagination and emotional responses, Interpretive – catalyzing the sharing of lived experiences and decisions, and Maieutic – eliciting a sense of wonder and openness to the transcendent dimension of life. The article includes both the theory and a practical walk-through model.

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## **A GUIDED DIALOGUE METHOD**

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*“ We don’t see that Spirit is fully and completely present right here, right now, because our awareness is clouded with some form of avoidance. We do not want to be choicelessly aware of the present; rather, we want to run away from it, or run after it, or we want to change it, alter it, hate it, love it, loathe it, or in some way agitate to get ourselves into, or out of , it. We will do anything except come to rest in the pure Presence of the present. Ken Wilber, Eye of Spirit*

**1** Today most of our clients are aware that society and its institutions are headed for major changes during the next millennium. They also understand that the individuals within their organizations are experiencing this as a time of rapid change. Furthermore, it is apparent to many that a shift of consciousness is taking place. As individuals within organizations change to manifest this shift of consciousness, their organizations also shift to reflect a new collective understanding. Many clients are becoming increasingly clear that they cannot address their organization’s exterior issues without addressing its inner problems. It is within this context that our clients ask us to facilitate planning and training events or to assist the organization’s leadership in their transformation and decision making processes.

**2** Over many generations ancient mystics and philosophers described the wholeness of the universe where no “thing” exists in isolation. That is, no thing exists or acts independently of the whole. This experience of wholeness influences the way people perceive and understand who they truly are. However, today an illusion of separateness between mind, spirit, and action is a primary operating image or self understanding for many people (Bohm, 1980). The Nobel laureate neuroscientist Roger Sperry (1981) states that the overemphasis on technology and the kind of scientific thinking that excludes the human soul has contributed to a neglect of our ultimate values, beliefs, motivations, and meanings. And Rob Lehman (1997) states that “we cannot civilize the outer world without civilizing the inner world.”

**3** In organizations that request our facilitation services the authors find people are becoming more aware of the spiritual dimension. They are experiencing an unfolding of a deeper spiritual freedom as they become conscious of the relationship between their inner life of mind and spirit and their outer life of action. What is emerging is a quest to discover, remember, or create

significance, purpose, and meaning in their work. Those reeling from stress and burn-out from an overemphasis on their engagement are now searching inward for courage, strength, wisdom, motivation, and energy. This reconciliation between the inner world of insights, images, moods, feelings, hopes, and assumptions and the outer world of action and matter, is leading them to an experience of personal wholeness.

**4** How do we as group facilitators create an environment for participants to fully experience the inner dimension of Spirit? How do we help participants connect with their inner spiritual nature that directs, empowers, and provides new energy for meaningful activity?

## **GUIDED DIALOGUE**

**5** The authors find helpful a process we call “Guided Dialogue.” This process originated as the Art Form Method, and was developed by the Ecumenical Institute to enable groups to experience deeper levels of consciousness. This method expanded participants’ capacity to stand outside themselves and reflect on what they were experiencing in the moment. An adaptation of this process, The Basic Discussion Method, often referred to as ORID (Objective, Reflective, Interpretive, Decisional), is now taught through demonstration and practice by the Institute of Cultural Affairs (ICA) in Group Facilitation Training Seminars and Advanced Training Programs as one of the Technologies of Participation (ToP) methods.

**6** The Guided Dialogue process provides an environment for the forming or “re-forming” of the deep part of the Self. Thus it is a “formation process.” Formation in its broadest meaning refers to the fact that any organism is in a state of flux or change. Within the context of this article the concept of formation implies that this change is not totally random nor meaningless. It does not take place in a vacuum, isolated from other people, events, and things, but is connected to the ongoing formation of the world around it. It further implies an implicit direction or guidance from beyond the individual person, event or thing itself, which also helps to give shape or form to it. Formative thinking enables people to transcend or go beyond the limits of their bodily senses and cognitive processes of rational thought and memory.

**7** One advantage of the Guided Dialogue is its versatility. It works well with groups where the individual members do not know each other and with groups in which they do. It works with a group that may never be together again as well as with well-established groups. It works with people of diverse backgrounds and age or with homogeneous groups. The authors use this process frequently at the beginning of a training or planning event and as a concluding reflective group exercise. It is particularly useful for discussion after a video, presentation, or reading a short piece of text or an inspirational poem. We use it also when reflection or evaluation about a specific topic or action is needed. The Guided Dialogue process is designed to elicit inclusive participation and provide an environment where a sense of meaning, purpose, and significance emerges. David Lester, CEO, of the Council of Energy Resource Tribes states that:

Learning this technology of participation and internalizing its intrinsic values of honor, respect, and compassion is an effective means of leadership development for a

multicultural America. In a single process, individuals and groups can find their own self-defined center and see a new paradigm of their intra- and inter-group relationships. The process humbles and empowers. The process liberates the individuals of the group and strengthens the group. Apparent contradictions are resolved not by conflict but through the revelation of higher principle. Inefficiency of consensus gives way to effectiveness of unity. The group moves not to its lowest common denominator as is often expected, but rises to its higher common values. The group is not pulled by a single dominating leader but is pushed by its members who take individual responsibility for leadership and followship. Each person contributes and each benefits in each other's processes of being and becoming.

**8** It is a contentless process that brings forth the “content” of rational and emotional responses and the lived experiences of the participants that are evoked by a particular piece of text, a video or other art form, a concrete action, or an event. It allows the group to become conscious of what it knows.

**9** The process works because it is a natural human process. When one enters into any conversation, a similar process is used. One observes who is in the room, hears talking, becomes immediately aware of liking or disliking what is being said or the way it is being said, interprets what it means, and responds by choosing to enter the conversation, remain silent, or leave the room. All of this is influenced by the connections made with the stream of meaning flowing among the members of the group, i.e. within participants and between participants. This is normally swift and unconscious, and it occurs all the time. In a guided dialogue, this natural process is simply slowed down to help it become mindful.

**10** The process guides the participants through the following progression of four interactive but distinctive levels of self-reflection:

1. **objective** - getting the participants' attention by engaging the senses
2. **reflective** - eliciting the participants' imagination and emotional responses
3. **interpretive** - catalyzing the sharing of lived experiences and decisions
4. **maieutic**<sup>1</sup>- eliciting a sense of wonder and openness to the transcendent dimension of life

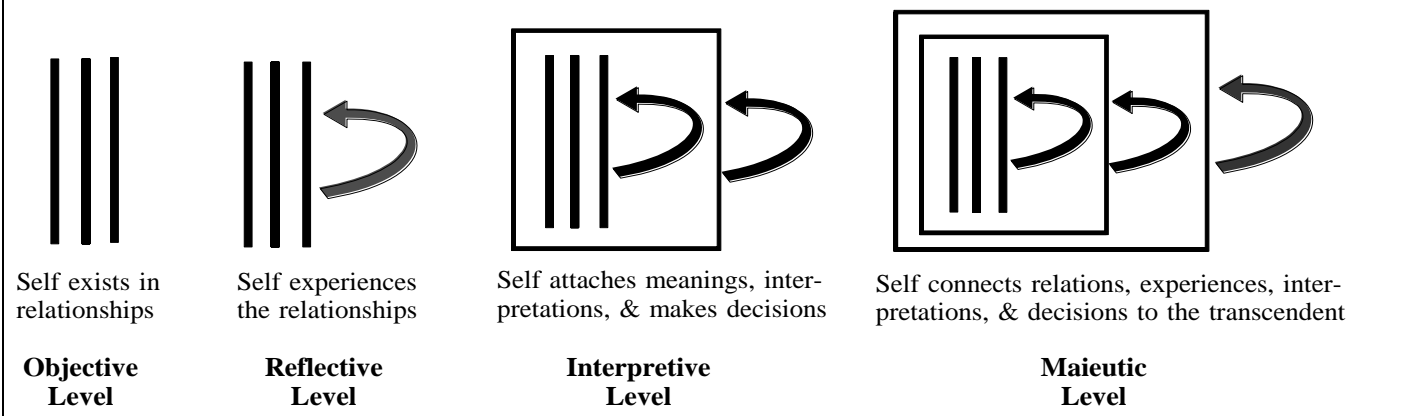
**11** It is the skillful use of questions that enable self-reflection and an increasing awareness of collective consciousness. Self-reflection results in shifts in consciousness, self-knowledge, and self-understanding. By using a natural critical thinking process, the participants of this guided dialogue are able to move from one level of awareness to deeper levels. None of the levels is static. Each has movement, builds on those before it, and sets the context for those that follow.

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<sup>1</sup> Maieutic comes from the Greek word “maieutikos” pertaining to midwifery or the process of helping a person to bring forth his or her latent knowledge.

12

According to Kierkegaard (p. 147) “*The self is a relation which in relating itself to itself, and willing itself to be itself, grounds itself transparently in the power which posits it.*” In simplified terms this says that a Self exists in relationships. It experiences these relationships. It attaches meanings and interpretations to these and it makes decisions about them. And it connects and integrates these relations, experiences, interpretations, and decisions. This is the philosophical undergirding that birthed the Art Form Method developed by the Ecumenical Institute in the 1950’s.



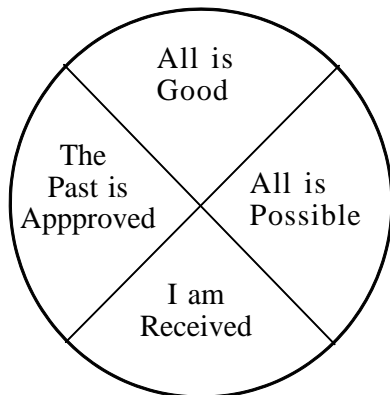
13 In the process described in this article, two modes of self-reflection are used: *introspection* and *transcendent self-presence*.

14 **Introspection** is the fascination with one’s own thoughts and sensations. It is standing outside yourself and analyzing your thoughts and feelings. This necessitates separating the “self” from its larger or more complete context. However, when the self loses awareness of these larger relationships, it becomes separated from the whole. In this separated state, an individual’s attention tends to focus on self-perfection or making the world a better place (van Kaam, 1985 p.176). One is often filled with a sense of obligation on what one “should” be thinking, feeling, or doing. A frequent response today is to turn to science and technology for help. In doing this, people tend to lose touch with the deeper directives and callings of their inherent soul because the scientific approach usually looks at consciousness as part of a space-time-matter-realm (Peter Russel, 1995). This inhibits them from experiencing the power of the spiritual, psychological, and physical resources which disclose the essence of who one truly is and catalyzes enthusiasm, creativity, and energy (Kloepfer, 1990. p. 27).

15 **Transcendent self-presence** is the awareness that the self is related to the whole of creation in its enormity and complexity. In this mode of self-reflection, one realizes that the spiritual dimension of life is not separate from the rest of life. It becomes possible to stand outside of one’s self and observe one’s self as connected to the whole universe. This is more integrative, meditative, and unitive than introspection and includes the awareness that a living presence permeates the universe. A deeper spiritual freedom unfolds which enhances one’s inner capacity to respond to the deeper callings of one’s true and deepest nature.

**16** It is in this mode of self reflection that the possibility of affirming both the infinite possibilities and the finiteness of life while experiencing both dread and fascination can occur. One experiences being at one with the universe. There is a sense of connectedness beyond the confines of mind or body. The self and the world are experienced as one single reality, not two different ones (Wilber, 1981, p 158).

**17** Joseph Mathews gave a concrete understanding of this mode in a lecture given in 1965 in New Orleans with the following image.



*In spite of the pain and suffering of life,  
**Life is good just as it is ...***

*In spite of my bag full of neuroses, fears, and faults,  
**I am received ...***

*In spite of all the tragedy and mistakes in the past  
**The past is approved . . .***

*In spite of all the pain, problems, and crises  
**The future is open and ALL IS POSSIBLE!***

## THE METHOD

**18** A brief introduction that presents the topic and reason for the conversation is given. The facilitator then starts with the first level of the dialogue.

### **OBJECTIVE LEVEL: Getting the participants' attention by engaging the senses**

**19** Following a brief introduction that presents the topic and reason for the conversation, simple descriptive questions are asked about the topic. As stated before, a conversation topic may be a video clip, a piece of written material, an art form, a shared event, or a simple concept or idea. The simpler and more direct the questions, the greater the chance to draw participants beyond their initial resistance into a state of self reflection about the topic. Questions at this point do not require deep thought, but simply ask for objective information that is easily observed through the senses and communicated spontaneously.

**20** The facilitator asks the questions in a non-threatening manner that expects a response. When the participant perceives that the facilitator is willing to accept answers to these initial questions, it builds an atmosphere of trust and openness. This invites participation. Participation means both the opportunity *to partake of* (listen) or *to take part in* (contribute vocally to) the dialogue (Bohn, 1997, p 47). A facilitator then does not become anxious when some participants do not volunteer

#### Sample Objective Questions

##### TEXT:

*What words stand out?  
 What did the author say?*

##### VIDEO:

*What scenes do you remember?  
 What sounds did you hear?*

##### VISUAL ART:

*What objects do you notice?  
 What colors did you see?*

to answer some of the questions. The facilitator's authenticity and integrity becomes obvious to the group. However, when it is especially important for each participant to speak, the facilitator may request each participant answer one of these questions. This is the only level at which a facilitator might request an answer from every participant.

**21** Enough time must be allowed for everyone to grasp the focus of the conversation, sense that they are "on the same page," and for introspective resistance to shift to an affirmative openness. In an hour-long dialogue, opening remarks and first-level questions rarely take more than 15 minutes unless it is a long video or complex text or art form.

**22** It is important to remember that no participant comes to a dialogue with an empty mind, or in a vacuum. The participant's mind is not like the scoop on the end of a stream shovel, dumping one load of matter before taking up another. Rather a participant is always in the context of his or her own unique set of internal questions, so both the facilitator's questions and participant's responses connect with each individual's particular conscious and unconscious questions. The individual's questions are far more significant to them than those asked by a facilitator.

**23** The questions move gradually from objective to subjective in the next level. There are three stage each within the Reflective and Interpretive levels.

## **REFLECTIVE LEVEL: Eliciting the participants' imagination and emotional responses**

**24** Reflective level questions request participants to use their imagination. In this context, imagination is understood to be the creation of connection or the perception of relationship not explicit in the dialogue's topic. These questions catch participants off guard when they are imagining what is physically not there. This helps them to respond naturally to the topic. They begin to evoke emotional sensitivities and involvement in addition to cognitive awareness of the topic. The participants are now being asked to actively reflect upon what they had earlier been asked only to passively acknowledge.

### **First Movement**

**25** The facilitator continues to ask simple questions. If the topic for discussion is a video clip or a piece of literature, the facilitator might ask, "*Which words or phrases occurred repeatedly throughout the video or text?*" This question is similar to an objective question, "*What words or phrases do you recall?*" asked in the first level, but requires some reflection for an answer. This can be considered a transitional question from level one to level two.

**26** Once the participants are comfortably reflecting on these questions, the facilitator may lead them to still further reflection by asking: "*What colors do you see as you glance at the words?*" or "*What objects in the video were used symbolically?*" Imagination is required for an answer. No discussion of meaning of a particular object, color, or phrase observed is called for here, simply indicating what stands out or what seems significant on first reflection.

## Second Movement

27 After this level of reflection has engaged participants' imaginations, the facilitator deepens the level of reflection again. A next possible question might be "*What emotions did you see expressed on the screen or in the text and where?*" This question is similar to, but is further removed from the objective or descriptive data of the video or text itself. It requires still more imagination. Participants' attention is still focused on the video or text. Then the facilitator asks, "*What emotions did the video or text evoke in you?*" The questions have now shifted from the objective data to the subjective response of the participants. This type of question is intended to be pivotal, moving from the topic and the group's descriptions of it to the inner life and personal responses of the participants themselves. Most participants become more absorbed in the discussion at this point and forget fatigue and self-preoccupation.

## Third Movement

28 The last shift within this second level of questions that elicits the participants' imagination sets up the transition into the third, or interpretive, level. The facilitator sensing the group is not only reflecting imaginatively upon the topic itself but is also reflecting upon their own emotional reactions to and involvement in it, might ask a question such as "*Which character in the video do you most identify with?*" or "*What lines in the poem have you found yourself saying?*" Regardless of the interest or disinterest of the participants in the topic itself, they have such a vested interest in their own emotions and reactions that these questions have the power to draw the group members into them. The answers of others in the group play a significant role as well. Hearing others expressing their feelings helps break down reluctance to acknowledge and share emotions. But whether verbal expression is given to an individual's answer or not, the individuals are called by the questions and by others' responses to look into themselves to find the answers. Just hearing others in the group express what you yourself are experiencing gives you courage or "en-courages" you to acknowledge and explore it further yourself. Because of this encouragement a person becomes free to disclose new facets of his or her inner life that may not have been previously revealed.

29 Usually a group can move through this level in about 5-10 minutes, providing the questions call for short answers.



30

### Power of Imagination

We have found that when these questions do not stimulate the participant's imagination that the participant is less likely to shift from the introspective mode of self-reflection to the transcendent-self-presence mode. Aristotle said the "the soul never thinks without an image." Perhaps there are several reasons for this.

In the reflective level of questions, the facilitator is creating an opportunity for participants to receive images and information that opens them to experience a shift of consciousness. Kenneth Boulding (1956) in his book, *"The Image,"* uses the concept of the image to explain the human processes of "learning, change, and growth." He claims that a person uses images to filter and perceive information and his experiences. He calls these "operational images." These operational images include -- consciously, unconsciously, or subconsciously -- the current integrative residue of information and knowledge possessed by the person. They govern our responses and behavior. A person grows or changes as his or her images change. The process of change is an interaction between this operating image and a shift of consciousness (pp 3-18).

According to J.C. Gowan, "imagination is an action of the mind that produces a new idea or insight." These new ideas and insights come "unheralded, as a flash, fully formed." When new ideas and insights do not come, our reflection and actions lack creativity and innovation.

### INTERPRETIVE LEVEL: Catalyzing the sharing of lived experiences and decisions

**31** The facilitator continues to shift the nature of the questions by probing for relationships, self-evaluation, and new levels of meaning. The questions are now about participants lives rather than the topic itself. These more evocative questions require deeper reflection and interpretation. The participants begin to make connections to their own lives by identifying with other participants' comments and through self-reflection.

**32** Interpretive questions ask participants to interpret the topic of discussion by relating it to the world or their own lived experience. This level does not require as many different questions as the earlier levels, but usually takes more time. The questions are not so easily answered, and require reflection.

#### First Movement

**33** The questions gradually move from the more personal, imaginative, and emotional responses elicited in the second level toward a meditative dwelling on the specific meaning and implications for one's own life. The first question asked at this level is usually something like "*What is really happening here?*" or "*What is this really about?*" Whereas the latter questions of the reflective level focus on the personal relationships and response of the participants to the

topic, these questions shift the focus of attention to the larger context of the whole text, video, or object. The questions call the participants to begin the process of **integration**, which require a dynamic movement between the concrete world of the particular dialogue and the more abstract world of ideas. This also initiates a similar movement between the unique world of the topic, which by now has been enhanced by the shared and private imaginative material from the previous dialogue, and the wider scope of the participants' interior world. Throughout this third level, the dynamic interplay of these polarities serves to broaden the stream of unfolding meaning.

### **Second Movement**

**34** Questions such as “*Where do you see this taking place in the world today?*” or “*What is this about?*” begin to take the conversation to an even deeper level. The “this” of the question is determined by the responses to the first questions of this third level. After asking the participants to step back from the topic and abstract from it some facet of human existence, the participants are asked to locate it in time and space. The context of the “world today” is intentionally inclusive, in order to move the sphere of thought beyond the individual realm and in order to put distance between participants and the meaning. At this point, the meaning asked for is related to experiences of the other people in the discussion. It is therefore not so difficult for the participants to share their answers to these questions with those they may not know intimately. It offers a possibility of knowing another person at a depth of intimacy without knowing that person personally.

### **Third Movement**

**35** The final questions of this Interpretive Level focus on increasingly concrete and personal applications for the meaning of the topic. The facilitator might ask, for example, “*Where do you see this taking place around you - in your city, neighborhood, place of work, or family?*” This moves the reflection still further toward the specific and concrete, and applies it to the actual life of people the participants know. Eventually, questions such as “*How is it taking place in your own life?*” will be asked. This is especially helpful for participants who are reluctant to look within but who easily exteriorize and intellectualize concepts.

**36** Through the interpretive level of the process, the reflection required becomes increasingly more personal and intimate. As others in the group share their responses to these questions, several things begin to happen. The process of identifying with others in the group through shared feelings and experiences deepens and intensifies. As people share how the particular realities and dynamics being discussed operate in their own lives, their own private thoughts and experiences are validated and the group gains courage to share still further. Deeper levels of care, compatibility, and compassion are shared. A sense of community frequently emerges. These dynamics of intimate shared self-disclosure with others and private self-reflection require time as well as sensitivity on the part of the facilitator.

**37** Without discerning the specific meaning and implications for one's own life, one is not able to experience a new level of self-understanding. Thus, the facilitator's skill in providing the time

and space for the participants to share their answers to the interpretive questions is crucial for the process of formation. It is wise to plan for at least 20-25 out of 60 minutes at this level. The participants who are now in an interpretative and self-reflective mode have opened themselves to wider inner horizons.

38

### **Blocks to Formation**

What blocks the participants from experiencing formation? An excessive fear of risk or change or an unwillingness to move from the status quo can block a participant in responding to interpretive questions. This fear of change inhibits the creative and imaginative power of poetic metaphor and analogous thinking required in answering questions in this level. Without poetic metaphors or analogous thinking it becomes difficult to move to deeper levels of identification, inquiry, intimacy, compassion, and meaning.

A person who is locked into a calculative, analytical mode of reflection finds it difficult to get beyond a superficial or literal level of interpretation or to resonate with answers from others who reflect a freer, more imaginative level of thinking. This skill to think imaginatively is developed through meditation and contemplation. On the other hand some participants get caught up in the wonder of their own experience or absorbed in the power of their emotional involvement with earlier questions. It may become difficult, if not impossible, for them to listen to other participants in the group. The drive for competition or validation can be so strong in some participants that they are blocked from hearing similarities between their answers and those of others in the group. This is frequently due to fear or negative self-image.

### **MAIEUTIC LEVEL : Eliciting a sense of wonder and openness to the transcendent dimension of life**

**39** The word “maieutic” is taken from the Greek word “maia,” meaning midwife, which implies that one is bringing forth a new interior form (Kloepfer, 1990, p. 183). The questions at this level are “maieutic” in the sense that the answers to the questions draw out or bring forth the latent ideas or inner wisdom that are of universal import to the individual. As the awareness of this latent wisdom emerges, the conversation shifts to the specific meaning and implications the topic has for participant’s own life. Up to this point the group dialogue has focused on the dynamics or relationships within the topic, the lived experiences of the members of the group, and their perceptions of the external world. The dialogue slows down as the conversation moves more into the transcendent self-presence mode of reflection. In this mode, an individual’s consciousness joins with or differs very little from that of the others.

**40** The final questions move the participant into still deeper levels of awareness by eliciting a sense of wonder. The questions are about the meaning of the topic in light of its “ultimate” meaning or universal horizon of human experience. As horizons of meaning and compassion are expanded, participants discover, discern, and affirm a deeper self-understanding and are given a

glimpse of a new manifestation of who they are. Participants are able to disidentify from sensations, emotions, and thoughts sufficiently to recognize that one's identity also includes a witnessing consciousness. (Elgin, 1993, p.132).

**41** The facilitator continues to change the nature of the questions directing the participants to reflect on ever wider horizons of meaning, including the underlying and broadest implications. Identification with the other participants now includes all of humanity. The transcendent dimension comes into play connecting the relationships, emotions, interpretations, meanings, and decisions disclosed in the first three levels of the dialogue and revealing its mysterious nature. Questions about the implications of the topic for their own lives, both as a group and as individuals, are asked. In addition, the facilitator may ask the participants whether the revealed universal meaning of the passage, for example, is "true." *"Is it true for you?" "Is it true for everyone?"* These questions call for a kind of inner movement or "commitment" on the part of the participants. This provides an opportunity, in light of all that has been revealed to them about the meaning of the topic to self-consciously take a deeper relationship to it or to open themselves to the deepest dimensions of their own spiritual journey. *Our higher potential as a species is our ability to achieve full self-reflective consciousness or "knowing that we know."* (Elgin, 1993, p. 18).

**42** The facilitator provides an environment for moments of silence and meditative reflection in response to these questions. Moments of silence during the conversation provide a participant the inner space necessary for the dynamic interplay of solitude and communication. When the facilitator and members of the group are willing to confirm and support each other in their responses and answers to questions at this level, then each participant is enabled to affirm any truth, even when painful, about themselves. This is a major component of transcendent self-presence. It relieves guilt and doubt and calms anxiety, thereby empowering each member to choose to be his or her unique Presence.

**43** The extent to which one chooses to take a self-conscious relationship to the topic depends upon numerous factors. The maturity of the group, its homogeneity, size, mood or state of mind, and the skill and sensitivity of the facilitator all play an important part. This is not a mechanical, step-by-step process that is at work, but an open, dynamic one. No one can predict or control the extent to which the formation will occur. Nevertheless, the potential is there for each individual to come to a new awareness or image of Self because the overall structure of the conversation provides this opportunity.

**44** The authors find that these questions are the most difficult to phrase. The facilitator must phrase these questions in such a way as to prevent the participants from returning to abstract or cognitive reflection on the overall meaning of the topic. Instead, the questions require answers that are grounded in the concrete lived experience of the participants so that the individuals are opened to new levels of self-awareness by relating their own lives to the ultimate and universal shared by all humans (Kloepfer, 1990, p.195). We try to allow at least 15-20 minutes for this level.

## The Experience of Transcendent Self-presence

**45** The dynamics present in the first three levels of question -- objective, reflective, and interpretive -- plus the first questions at the maieutic level create a field where a state of transcendent self-presence can operate. During the final questions, an individual can be fully aware of the questions being asked, the other members of the group, and their responses to these questions while engaging in self-reflection. Everything gets put into a new perspective. It is like seeing it all through a new set of glasses. Things that had once seemed fuzzy are brought into focus. Or it is like relaxing your focus on a 3D illusion. Suddenly depth and dimension appear. One gets a glimpse of one's true Self, a Self centered not in ego -- but as a transcendent Presence. As individuals experience this transcendent self-presence, the boundaries of time and space seem to disappear. There is a sense of wonder and awe as the participants stand before the larger picture of what they themselves have been saying. *This state of awareness opens the interior world by placing the person in the presence of the all-pervasive mystery of Being where authentic "selfhood" resides* (Kloepfer, 1990, p.191).

**46**

### Blocks to Transcendent Self-Presence

Several dynamics can block transcendent self-presence. "The first is a propensity to moralize and thus bring to closure the meaning of a text or event and therefore its implications and imperatives" (Kloepfer, 1990, p. 233). A second is the tendency to feel guilty about one's own limitations or weaknesses. Both of these block authentic self-presence by preventing a sense of connection to the whole.

Third, a judgmental attitude or atmosphere within the group or on the part of the facilitator can block transcendent self-presence. It severely limits the willingness of the participants to risk becoming aware of their inner selves, much less sharing and exposing it to others. Without this willingness to risk an awareness of their true condition they are less receptive to formative change.

Fourth, what appears to be the most difficult obstacle for many participants in the Western scientific world is to let go of the need to feel as though they are in control of their formation and go beyond the more familiar and more comfortable functional dimension of rationality. As maieutic questions lead the participants to become aware of the transcendent dimension, they intuit that something new or different is being demanded. The fear of the unknown can make it difficult for them to freely enter into the experience of wonder that is required to experience transcendent self-presence.

47 To summarize:

- The process of formative questioning can, through stages of reflective thought, expand people's horizons of meaning, enabling them to move to greater self-understanding.
- Four naturally and dynamically related but distinct states or levels are present in guided dialogue.
- Different types of questions facilitate the movement from one level to another, providing an environment for collective consciousness to emerge.
- Images and imagination play a crucial role in the second level of formative thinking.
- The capacity to listen to what others are saying and to share one's own experience opens one to experience their own formation.
- Deeper levels of self disclosure occur by relating concrete lived experience to the ultimate and universal dimension of life.

48 The releasing of transcendent self-presence in a group requires specific facilitation skills. We believe that only those facilitators who are well grounded in their own spiritual nature will attempt to guide a group through the maieutic level. Many dialogues end at the interpretive level with practical implications or general group decisions without the group or individuals within it experiencing a shift of consciousness. But as participants' level of consciousness increases, groups will begin to need and expect facilitators who help them access their inner sources of wisdom and provide an environment for collective consciousness to emerge.

49 Ritscher (1986) in talking about leadership says that one begins with the question "How do I **do** it? What specific actions(methods) do I take?" However, these questions do not go deep enough. The real question is not "How to **do** it?" but rather "How to **be** it? The qualities of leadership (facilitation) are inner, spiritual qualities. They do not involve "doing" as much as "being." If you have the "being" worked out, the "doing" will come naturally. The reverse is not true.

50 A new spirit mode is emerging. How can group facilitators be prepared to meet this challenge? It will require continual energy and authentic enthusiasm. It will include the individual practice of self reflection, authentic self-presence, and a discipline of being aware of the internal states of being manifested in the way each question is asked as well as in the giving of consideration to the approaches and facilitation methods used in any given situation.

**ILLUSTRATION OF A FACILITATOR'S PROCEDURES  
FOR A GUIDED DIALOGUE ON "THE WOODCARVER"**

**The Woodcarver**

*from The Way of Chuang Tsz, ed. & trans. By Thomas Merton, pp 110-11*

*Khing, the master carver, made a bell stand  
Of precious wood. When it was finished,  
All who saw it were astounded. They said it must be  
The work of spirits.  
The Prince of Lu said to the master carver:  
"What is your secret?"*

*Khing replied: "I am only a workman:  
I have no secret. There is only this:  
When I began to think about the work you commanded  
I guarded my spirit, did not expend it  
On trifles, that were not to the point.  
I fasted in order to set  
My heart at rest.  
After three days fasting,  
I had forgotten gain and success.  
After five days  
I had forgotten praise or criticism.  
After seven days  
I had forgotten my body  
With all of its limbs.*

*"By this time all thought of your Highness  
And of the court had faded away.  
All that might distract me from the work  
Had vanished.  
I was collected in the single thought  
Of the bell stand.*

*"Then I went to the forest  
To see the trees in their own natural state.  
When the right tree appeared before my eyes,  
The bell stand also appeared in it, clearly, beyond doubt.  
All I had to do was to put forth my hand  
And begin.*

*"If I had not met this particular tree  
There would have been  
No bell stand at all.*

*"What happened?  
My own collected thought  
Encountered the hidden potential in the wood  
From this live encounter came the work  
Which you ascribe to the spirits."*

**52** This conversation was prepared for a group of 35 adults from across an organization who did not know one another well, but had been asked to evaluate the effectiveness of a strategic plan for transformation that had been put into operation one year ago. The facilitator reads aloud the following poem then passes out copies of it to each participant and reads it aloud again. The conversation requires approximately one hour.

**53** In conducting the guided dialogue, not all the questions need to be asked. We usually prepare more questions than we actually ask and frequently reword the questions to fit appropriately into the on going dialogue.

54	<b>Sample Questions</b>	<b>Intent/purpose of Questions</b>
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	<b>OBJECTIVE LEVEL:</b> getting the participants attention by engaging the five senses (Impressionistic questions)	(Cognitive awareness of the topic)
	<b>10 minutes</b>	
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>What words caught your attention?</i></li> <li>2. <i>What phrases or lines stood out for you?</i></li> <li>3. <i>What lines of dialogue do you remember?</i></li> <li>4. <i>Who were the characters in this poem?</i></li> <li>5. <i>What is the story of the poem?</i></li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Get the participants’ attention</li> <li>• Review words, phrases, and story of the poem</li> <li>• Easy questions to answer</li> <li>• Invite participation</li> </ul>
<hr/>		
	<b>REFLECTIVE LEVEL:</b> eliciting the participants imagination and emotional responses (Imaginal questions)	(Personal reflective responses to the poem)
	<b>10 minutes</b>	
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>What emotions were felt by Khing?</i></li> <li>2. <i>What emotions did you feel as you heard the poem? Where?</i></li> <li>3. <i>What did the bell stand look like?</i></li> <li>4. <i>What lines of dialogue made complete sense to you?</i></li> <li>5. <i>Which ones raised questions for you?</i></li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evoke the use of one’s imagination</li> <li>• Enable participants to become absorbed in the dialogue</li> <li>• Enable participants to become personally engaged in the dialogue</li> <li>• Initiate meditative self-transcendence</li> </ul>
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	<b>INTERPRETIVE LEVEL:</b> catalyzing the sharing of lived experiences and decisions (Questions connecting poem to the world)	(Engaging the intellectual faculties of the Self)
	<b>20 minutes</b>	
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>In a few words, what is this poem about?</i></li> <li>2. <i>What is going on? What is really happening with the fasting?</i></li> <li>3. <i>What was the “secret?”</i></li> <li>4. <i>Where do you see this taking place in people, situations you know?</i></li> <li>5. <i>Where do you see it taking place in your own life? Within yourself?</i></li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Illuminate participant’s world</li> <li>• Enable participants to see connections</li> <li>• Empower participant’s to identify with others</li> <li>• Disclose one’s participation in the transcendent dimension of life</li> <li>• Encourage participant’s to get in touch with the truth about themselves</li> </ul>



**MAIEUTIC LEVEL:** eliciting a sense of wonder and openness to the transcendent dimension of life

(Questions that expose universal meaning)

(Expanding or personal, spiritual horizons of meaning and direction)

***15 minutes***

1. *When have you found the “right tree?”*
2. *Describe “the encounter” in the next to last line.*
3. *Tell a story about what this poem means.*
4. *What does this poem have to say about one’s actions/accomplishments?*
5. *Is this true? Is it true about your work? How?*
6. *What would it look like for you to act in this way?*

- Open participants to transcendent self-presence
- Calm anxiety and expand compassion
- Enable participants to connect with the transcendent dimension of life
- Deepen participants sense of who they are
- Expose shared meaning
- Provide space for participants to respond to and affirm internal directives

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