**SSZC GUIDELINES FOR WORKING THROUGH CONFLICT**

**PART III Self Reflection**

Most of us don’t like difficult or conflict situations. They frequently arouse strong feelings and may pose a threat in some way. And yet, the dharma gate of engaging in conflict with awareness is a powerful spiritual practice.

*If you can’t find the truth right where you are, where do you find it? Dogen*

Personal Inquiry: Sit, Reflect, 4 Perspectives, Consider

Sit: Sit with, turn toward and explore the feelings and sensations connected with the conflict.

*When if even for the briefest of moments, we take pause in the dead spot, the moment of non-action, before we react, we step through a door marked Enter Here and meet life just as it is, in just this moment. It is in this moment of Just This…that we meet the power and creativity to break away from our habitual thoughts, emotional matrix, body patterns and energy that fuel and direct our reactions. Diane Rizotto*

Slowly, give the feelings space, stay present and feel the energy of the body. Mind is usually flooded by the story; suspend the story and just feel, experiencing it as it is. Add an even, gentle breath to manage any overwhelming sensations. As soon the feeling state becomes manageable, thoughts will usually try to reassert the story; nip that in the bud. Instead gently bring focus back to feeling, practicing unbiased observation, an experience of just paying attention to sensation and emotion.

Reflect, remain present, observing everything about the issue without having to do anything about it.

For the moment, allow yourself to explore what is while suspending opinions, comparisons, preferences and judgments.

* What were the circumstances in which it arose?
* Does something about it feel wrong or bad?
* Is there a belief or pattern involved: flight, fight, freeze, ease or appease?
* Is there anything that’s right about it; a truth or intelligence it points to?
* How could you grow by meeting it rather than avoiding it?

4 Perspectives:

Explore the conflict or disagreement from 4 different perspectives.

1. “I” Begin with the first person and describe your version of the events in detail. Experience this way of telling the story as completely true and legitimate.

2. “You” Now tell the story from the first perspective of the other player in the conflict. We have agendas and scripts for each other and want people to fulfill our idea of who we think they should be for us, rather than taking them in their own terms. For this perspective, do your best to enter their world and to see circumstances through their eyes.

3. “It” Bring an objective perspective to bear. How would the situation look to a neutral witness or bystander? Is there any relevant objective information that might be helpful? Is there a neutral observer, someone who could offer a third perspective on the situation? Can you include that information as a more objective viewpoint?

4. “We” Look for the overlap between your version of the story, the other side’s and the neutral perspective. What are your shared interests that underlie each perspective? Can you brainstorm ways to meet those shared interests? How does it feel to settle into the shared perspective of “we”?

Some considerations in preparing for dialogue:

*If we establish the intention to be as awake as possible, it soon extends to our communication with others. We find that we want to be more engaged with the people in our lives. We aspire to give and receive in a true figure eight of belonging and authenticity. Diane Musho Hamilton*

Clarify intention:

*Am I interested in:*

* *Listening or more in having my opinion heard?*
* *Exchanging a view or forging a solution?*
* *Staying present when conflict arises instead of leaving in some way?*
* *Listening to uncomfortable feedback without withdrawing emotionally?*
* *Practicing saying no without self-doubt or regret?*
* *Learning to laugh when my ego feels threatened in communication?*
* *Staying present rather than reacting or withdrawing, present to things as they are?*
* *Working with old scenarios in new ways?*

Clarify motives.

I may have good intentions, only to discover motives, fears, and/or beliefs, are getting in the way. Underlying motivations and intentions do not always align. For example, I may intend to establish greater communion, but may not be able to resist my urge to dominate. I may think I want honesty in communication but have an overwhelming desire to please others. I may want greater emotional connection while being compelled to avoid intensity of feeling.

Faulting/blaming:

*In order to transform conflict, we must first let go of the notion that something or someone is wrong or bad. In doing so, the resulting fundamental resistance, the first obstacle to working with conflict, is released and the space of possibilities opens. Diane Musho Hamilton*

Giving feedback:

*Zen is about right relationship. When giving feedback, do it well and we take a step forward together, do it poorly and we tend to take a step away. Our brains are built, genetically evolved, to be cautious with our efforts; engagement is expensive from a biological standpoint. We might think effective feedback is about the quality of the information, this and not that. Feedback isn’t just feedback; there’s something more at work – it’s a vital clue about relationship.*

Listening is essential to all conflict resolution, almost alchemical in its power to transform a conversation or conflict. When someone really feels heard, anxiety diminishes, defensiveness disappears and true listening begins. Temporarily relinquish attachment to our internal voice in our head.

Forgiveness**:**

Forgiveness is the resolution of objecting to something and the release of our upset. Holding onto these hurts can poison us emotionally and physically. It brings an inner freedom to choose our spirit no matter what the circumstance of life. At the heart of forgiveness are gratitude and compassion which arise after the losses involved have been deeply felt and processed. Begin with the core components of forgiveness: taking less personal offense, blaming the offender less, and offering more personal and situational understanding of self and other.

Apologies…are not for the weak. If you’ve erred, a real apology is a critical first step. A good one doesn’t deflect blame to extenuating circumstances or on the deficiencies of others. Instead, it’s a straightforward acknowledgment of the situation and a simple, sincere acceptance of responsibility. This is the right thing to do – and that’s the primary reason to do it. But as a bonus, it can start defusing the anger, disappointment or frustration of others in the aftermath.

Recognize your part in the problem: “*I am part of a problem, and I’d like your help to untangle it.”*

Courage:

*Bottling up your feelings and not saying what you want can lead to numbness inside, preoccupations, distance from others and lost opportunities. By learning to draw upon inner allies, creating safe conditions for communication, and using wise speech, you can improve your relationships and find your own inner peace as well. Rick Hanson*

If you know what you want your life to be, possibly a yearning is to express your core values, and you feel some level of threat in doing so, then it takes courage. If my value is to be in loving connected relationships it makes me more willing to express things that are different. I may choose truth over harmony, or love over numbness.

**PART IV: Skills and methods for those in the conflict and those helping resolve it**

Having conducted your own personal inquiry, you may want to discuss the conflict with others. For example:

* Talking to a Sangha member(s) to receive further insight and even advice (“consultation”);
* Dokusan with the spiritual teacher
* I*nformally* approaching the person who you feel has upset you to talk it over (“negotiation”). You may even decide to consult with a Sangha member to help you with this.
* Asking a Sangha member to sit and talk with you and the person/people with whom you perceive you have a conflict, with the intention to resolve the conflict. (“Mediation”)

**Structured discussions: The Steps towards effective Communication and Resolution**

Although mediation and negotiation may be referred to as structured meetings, the descriptions below are not intended to be rigid. The parties involved will always bring their own wisdom to the situation, and may choose different techniques. This part will describe the steps for negotiation (with or without Sangha help), and for mediation meetings.

Principle based Guidelines:

All parties can play a role in minimizing potential suffering:

For sangha members generally:

* Using right speech that objectively describes the facts without assumptions and inflammatory language,

For those helping to resolve the conflict:

* Using self-reflection to bring compassion and calmness throughout the process.
* Giving prompt and fair notice to the parties involved of any efforts to resolve the conflict. Use compassionate action, such as gentle communication inviting the parties to a dialogue at a time and place agreeable to them. Avoid putting the disputants on the spot, embarrassing or surprising them in a public place.
* Maintaining confidentiality of the facts. If describing details of the events to others not directly involved, doing so respectfully and mindful of the effects on those involved that you are sharing the information and how you are doing so. Deciding to share based on a measured need to know basis,
* Supporting parties of the dispute without inciting more suffering and creating positional divisiveness. Encouraging parties who seek to discuss the substance of the dispute, to do so under private, controlled circumstances.[[1]](#footnote-1)
* Engaging in self-reflection. Making every effort to see how you bring your own judgments and feelings to this exercise. Rather than ignoring your bias, judgment or feelings, use self-reflection strategies (such as dipping, meditation, journaling, or discussion with a trusted friend) to observe your reactions as a source of a deeper level of understanding of the parties, and the conflict.

**Negotiation, or direct dialogue between the disputants:**

The disputants may decide to meet and discuss the conflict with assistance from another sangha member(s) (volunteers who form the Salt Spring Zen Circle’s Alternative Dispute Resolution group.) The disputants do most of the work, the other sangha member(s) assist(s) as a neutral party by creating the space and conditions and agreement for the discussion.

Here is an example of how it might be done:

BEFORE THE DAY THE DIALOGUE OR NEGOTIATION TAKES PLACE - Have a brief discussion with parties, separately, in advance, for the purpose of:

• Setting a date, time and place for the dialogue/negotiation meeting, mutually agreed upon by the parties;

• Hearing each party describe the conflict and the resolutions they are seeking;

• Ensuring there is agreement by both parties to voluntarily engage in the negotiation process;

• Identifying any special needs for the parties;

• Arranging for the parties to bring to the meeting, as needed:

* any required mats and cushions,
* material related to the perceived conflict,
* Snack food and tea;.

1. ON THE DAY OF THE NEGOTIATION –Remain close to the meeting room as a neutral party, if agreed upon by the parties, for the purpose of :

Facilitating breaks or meditation sessions,

•If requested, attending the meeting to witness and take notes of the proceedings,

1. FOLLOWING THE MEETING – Assist by following through on matters agreed upon at the previous negotiation meeting that took place.

**Mediation:**

Mediation requires more involvement from the other sangha member(s). The intent is to turn the focus from "positions" ("I am right, they are out of line!") - which tend to be defended in ways that perpetuate the situation - towards interests (and/or needs) of the parties ( "I don't like to make eye contact in the zendo") which may be easier for the parties to cooperate on. Interests can be fit into categories, for example:

* A procedural interest relates to process in which the dispute is resolved
* A substantive interest relates to money, control or resource
* A psychological interest relates to feelings or emotions about the issue.

A Mediator will try to identify all interests before and within the Mediation.

A hypothetical schedule of how a SSZC member (or members) could mediate is outlined below. It is not intended to be an exact description of how to proceed, but rather to outline the steps, and illustrate the principles involved.

1. BEFORE THE DAY OF THE MEDIATION - Have a brief discussion with both parties for the purpose of:

a. Setting a date, time and place for the mediation meeting, mutually agreed upon by the parties;

b. Hearing each party describe the conflict in preparation for identifying interests/needs and framing the issues;

c. Ensuring there is voluntary agreement to the process;

d. Identifying any special needs for the parties;

e. Arranging for the parties to bring:

i. Their mats and cushions

ii. Material needed for the meeting

iii. Snack food and water/tea to the meeting.

2. ON THE DAY OF THE MEDIATION, the Mediator will:

a. Open the meeting by:

i. Offering greetings and expressions of gratitude,

ii. Setting the objective chosen for the Mediation meeting.

b. Lead the participants in a short meditation sit;

c. Lay the ground work for the mediation:

* + 1. Describe the process parties can expect,
    2. Describe the role and authority of the Mediator,
    3. Establish the ground rules for conduct,
    4. Review the parties’ agreement to mediate,
    5. Field any discussion about process interests,
    6. Confirm that both parties are committed and ready to proceed to the mediation.

d. Elicit a brief synopsis of narrative from the parties individually: (Consider timing these sessions.)

i. Party one (who first perceived the conflict) is asked to provide a brief free narrative synopsis of the facts of the dispute. This is for a timed period of five minutes without interruption while the mediator and other Party listen.

ii. Party two also provides their narrative for five minutes without interruption while others listen.

e. Frame the issues:

i. The Mediator clarifies and frames the issues and then turns to and hears from each party any modifications. The issues framed should be acceptable to both parties.

f. Lead the participants in a short meditation session (optional).

g. Elicit a full narrative from each party, individually, of their substantive and psychological interests and document them for reference in the dialogue(see “interests” p.7)

* + 1. The Mediator focuses first on Party one to elicit and identify their interests.
       1. by asking what is important to him/her in the conflict, and encourage them to speak freely, giving background, descriptions, and examples.
       2. by asking clarifying questions to Party one, to seek the underlying interests beyond those that are first apparent.
       3. Funnel questioning can be used, followed if necessary by open ended questions, followed, if necessary, by clarification and elaboration questions.
       4. The Mediator also engages in looping;
          1. by re-iterating what the Mediator observes as the perspective of Party one including the issues, feelings and conflict.
          2. Party one informs the Mediator if the interpretation is correct.
          3. If not, the exercise continues until Party one is satisfied that what was said by him/her has been understood by the Mediator.

5. The other Party (Party two) listens and does not interrupt.

* + 1. The Mediator now turns to Party two and asks if they have any questions for Party one.
       1. Party two asks any questions to Party one, does not interrupt when Party one answers.
       2. Party two engages in looping with Party one where appropriate.
    2. The Mediator then focuses on Party two to elicit his/her interests using the same procedure as above, namely:
       1. asking Party two to describe what is important to him/her about what is occurring, giving background and descriptions with examples,
       2. using funnel questioning, and looping,
    3. Party one listens to Party two.
    4. The Mediator includes Party one:

. (1) by asking Party one if he/she has questions of Party two,

. (2) Party two answers Party one’s questions while the latter listens without interruption.

. (3) Party one engages in looping with Party two if necessary.

* + 1. The Mediator questions both parties where he or she observes conduct, including body language, suggesting issues not verbally articulated, giving equal attention and empathy to each party and inviting each to engage in looping of the responses of the other party.
    2. Finally, (optional: using the flip chart) the mediator makes a goal statement incorporating the interests that have been documented previously.

h. Lead the parties in meditation for five minutes,

i. Adjourn the meeting for a food break,

j. Facilitate a resolution seeking session by generating options (Brain storming):

* + 1. By inviting parties to offer resolutions guided by the information discovered,
    2. By listening and writing all suggestions offered.
    3. By evaluating the list of suggestions based on whether they satisfy as many interests for both parties as possible.

k. Facilitate the development of an action plan:

* + 1. Listen to the Parties about the details of *who, what, when, where, how* and emphasizing the common ground ,
    2. Determine how the plan, once implemented, might be monitored.

l. If no plan is forthcoming,

* + 1. Discuss the next step, and whether to seek more information,
    2. Continue to build trust or reduce fear by developing plans around the next meeting.

m. Close the mediation:

* + 1. guide the parties through a meditation and mutual bows.

n. Adjourn the meeting.

3. FOLLOWING THE MEDIATION - The Mediator will assist with follow through, as agreed upon by both parties

Glossary:

* ADR means a process followed to resolve a dispute without entering litigation. ADR are initials for alternative dispute resolution or appropriate dispute resolution.
* DISPUTANT is the person(s) involved in the dispute, that is: there is a conflict which has grown into a dispute between two or more people, all of whom are called disputants for purposes of reference.
* Salt Spring Zen Circle Alternative Dispute Resolution Group are volunteers from experienced SSZC members whom other members may request to assist with internal SSZC related conflicts.

TYPES OF ADR COMMUNICATION

* NEGOTIATION[[2]](#footnote-2) is any form of un-facilitated communication in which opposing parties discuss steps they could take to resolve a dispute between them.
* MEDIATION occurs when a third party attempts to facilitate disputing parties towards a voluntary settlement chosen by them.
* FACILITATION takes place in a meeting between parties to a dispute, or in a decision-making meeting. A facilitator directs the group through techniques to improve the flow of information.
* SHARED DECISION MAKING takes place where those with authority to make a decision and those who will be affected by that decision meet and share interests towards reaching a consensus on dispute resolution. The goal is to jointly empower the groups and to seek an outcome that accommodates the interests of all concerned.

COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

* DIPPING is a process whereby a person connects to their inner experience to maintain presence. Dipping involves checking in on what one is thinking, feeling (physical and emotional), whether they are on topic, whether the topic needs to be changed and what’s next. The alternative is to be distracted by thoughts, judgments and feeling, or hide them, resulting in separation.[[3]](#footnote-3)
* FUNNEL QUESTIONING is a structured interview process where an interviewer is conscious of allowing the interviewee to provide a free narrative without interruption. The interviewer starts with open ended questions such as, “Can you tell me what happened?” and listens to the response. The next questions are prompts such as, “What happened next?”. After the narrative is complete, the interviewer asks some clarification questions such as, “You said you felt afraid about how he acted. Tell me more about that.” Only after the interviewee has had a full opportunity to speak without interruption will closed questions be asked for further clarification and elaboration such as, “You at first told us it was 2010 in Vernon and later you said 2013. What year was it?” The funnel starts wide and narrows at the end of the interview. The goal is to limit the influence the interviewer has over the content from the interviewee.
* LOOPING is a process designed to ensure understanding between the parties. The mediator starts by asking each party individually about their respective interests. When party one is finished, the mediator having listened intently, repeats his/her interpretation of what the party said, felt, was thinking and the like. If the mediator is correct in the interpretation the loop is complete. If not, the party clarifies their position and interests until it is understood. Eventually the mediator asks the parties to engage in looping of each-others’ narratives having seen the technique modelled by the mediator.

Quotations

In the context of conflict resolution practice, the moments in which our ego is offended are golden. They provide the perfect opportunity to see or self-protectiveness at work and learn to unwind it. Conflict isn’t the problem, our response to it is.

Impulses are not imperatives. We start to reprogram, offering ourselves something like “gently now, gently”, giving us the space to take a perspective on our momentary perspective.

We consciously choose new ways to relate to ourselves and to each other…we are confronting the protective mechanisms of our ego in the moment. Much in the same way we have learned to countenance difficult sensations while meditating, we find we can remain present despite all sorts of impulses to do something else.

You might think of conflict as a kind of loss or potential loss, but it’s actually fueled by the draw of wholeness. Instead of willing yourself to avoid the bad, preparing for and using the opportunity to explore a conflict, will naturally draw you in the direction of wholeness.

Fearlessness comes from including fear not from being free of it, becoming aware of what it looks like, tastes like, and feels like in our mind and body, being able to relate to fear directly. Diane Musho Hamilton

The difficulty things provoke all our irritations and bring our habitual patterns to the surface. And that becomes the moment of truth; you can choose to launch into the lousy habitual patterns you already have, or to stay with the rawness and discomfort of the situation and let it transform you, on the spot. Pema Chodrun

Real equanimity isn’t indifference. It’s the capacity to be present with your whole being and not add fuel to the fire. Jack Kornfield

INTERVIEW IN LION’S ROAR TOPICS

Buddha dharma – Winter ’05, Conversation, Jack Kornfield, Michael Krasny, Pema Chodrun

I am an artist and a free thinker. I don’t mind re-examining established teachings and theories and translations and I expect perfections is a kind of western projection, perfect health, perfect relationship, perfect look.[…] if you have to struggle to perfect something , please go ahead. How can you perfect it? However, realizing wisdom beyond may be more friendly. We can strive to realize at any moment, which is the heart of Buddhism. Kaz Tanahashi

Don’t soft-pedal high standards. Don’t pretend that it’s easy – do the opposite. Emphasize the toughness of the task, and be open hearted to the possibility we have what it takes. Jeff Hayden

Try to identify where the relationship went wrong and decide whether there’s anything you can do to get things back on track. Travis Bradberry, Emotional Intelligence

Savour the respect of other. Be glad you avoided needless quarrels. Feel good about not harming others. Be glad you’ve cleared the field so you can focus on getting your wants met in the relationship. If you don’t register your positive states – if you don’t take the dozen seconds or so to help them sink in – they make little or no difference to your brain: then there’s no learning, no improvement in neural structure or function, and thus no lasting benefit.

Mindfulness is sustained in present moment awareness which itself does not try to change anything. But *alongside* that awareness can be wise efforts to be mindful. - as anyone knows who’s tried to stay mindful of just ten breaths in a row. The mind +brain resists change. So just observing it is not enough. We also need to make deliberate efforts to let go of tension, rumination, grudges, painful emotions, old trauma, and addictive cravings. We also need to let in – to cultivate – grit and resilience, virtue, feeling cared about, gratitude, compassion, and insight. (Rick Hansen, Hardwiring Happiness.)

Mindfulness is wonderful…it helps you step back from reactions, understand yourself and others, and see into the nature of experience itself: impermanent, with many parts and causes, insubstantial, and not to be clung to. It’s a vital part of the path of healing and growth, but not the whole of it. Rick Hansen from a post called *More than Mindful* – 2 myths about mindfulness.

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1. This is subject to an exception where one party feels they are in danger and must seek protection from others. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. [Dispute Resolution Office - Ministry of Justice](http://www.ag.gov.bc.ca/dro/)  http://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/justice/about-bcs-justice-system/dispute-resolution-office/alternative-dispute-resolution-policy-and-design/policy-statement [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Friedman, Gary, *Inside Out*, (2014), American Bar Association, Chicago at page 23 and Fischer, N. ,*Taking Our Places*, (2004), Harper, San Francisco [↑](#footnote-ref-3)