

MINDFULNESS IN DIALOGUE

I've often wondered about what makes a dialogue possible. It seems to me that there is one requirement that is absolutely necessary in order to have a dialogue between two or more people. The requirement is that "I must be open to the possibility of being wrong or mistaken". Of course, it also implies that my interlocutor (or interlocutors) must also be open to this possibility, because it is pointless to attempt to have a dialogue with someone who is only interested in defending his or her views, or in convincing you that they are obviously right.

As long as I am truly and sincerely open to the possibility of being wrong or mistaken, I remain open to learning, and I can really listen to what others are saying. Moreover, if I am able to convey such an attitude through my words, body language and actions, it may help others relax their defenses and bring about a similar stance with respect to the dialogue.

Needless to say, being open to the possibility of being wrong or mistaken does not prevent me from expressing my views with conviction. It does however imply that I must be willing to explain the assumptions underlying my views, and that I must be open to have those assumptions questioned or challenged.

For most of us, the principal difficulty with adopting this attitude is that the possibility of being wrong or mistaken tends to generate varying degrees of anxiety or fear. This is almost inevitable because my self-image (and hence my sense of security) is based to a large extent on what I believe about myself, others and the world. Therefore, enacting this attitude implies having a certain amount of courage to face the accompanying uncertainty and anxiety, and/or a certain degree of detachment vis-à-vis my own beliefs and opinions.

That is why the practice of *mindfulness*¹ is so important in a dialogue. By paying attention to what is happening within me while I am listening, speaking or being in silence, I may be able to notice my judgments, emotions and impulses as they arise. This "direct seeing" (as opposed to "thinking about what just happened") has the power to prevent or interrupt automatic and impulsive reactions, and free me to generate more reflective and deliberate actions.

¹ If you want to find out more about *mindfulness*, you can visit my website at: <http://www.alespra.com> (for the spanish version) or <http://www.alespra.com/english> (for the english version).