

Transformative Experiences

Group Discussion Guide

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Here are the basic guidelines and parameters for our small-group discussions. The same methods and questions can also be used and adapted outside of the workshop, either for solo personal reflection, or with a group of family members, friends, or neighbors.

Organizing

When you arrive in your breakout rooms, take just a minute or two, to choose individuals to take on the following roles in your group:

- A timekeeper, who will watch the clock, and keep the discussion on schedule.
- A screen-sharer: someone on a full-sized laptop, who can use the Zoom screen sharing function to place these instructions on everyone's screen, if someone asks for this.
- Two storytellers, who will each share an account of a transformative experience (either fully in the past, or ongoing/recent) with the group, as a starting point for discussion.

Sharing and Discussion

We will have two “rounds” of sharing and discussion. Each will follow this format:

Story telling (5 minutes):

- The **storyteller** will share his/her experience with the group.
 - *Please do NOT feel obligated to share anything you don't want to, nor to go into any more detail than you are comfortable with.*
- The **timekeeper** (who is also a listener) will keep an eye on the clock:
 - After 4 minutes (with about 1 minute left), signal unobtrusively to the speaker, without interrupting. Maybe just wave your arms dramatically on camera, etc.
 - At the 5-minute mark, politely intervene, to invite the group to switch from story telling/listening, to analysis.
- The **listeners** (all other members of the group) will listen respectfully, without interrupting, and consider the following questions:
 - Are there features of this experience which seem important, that **fit neatly** into one of the categories of our model?
 - Are there features of this experience which seem important, that **have a hard time** fitting into our model?
 - Are there any features that we would expect to see (based on our model) which are **missing** from the experience as told?

Analysis (10 minutes):

- During the first round, the **timekeeper** will continue to keep an eye on the clock:
 - After 9 minutes (with about 1 minute left), signal unobtrusively to the group. You might (in a polite way) even break into a pause, to say “one minute left.”
 - At the 10-minute mark, politely invite the group to switch wrap up this discussion and shift to the second round of story telling.
 - During the second round, all groups will get a warning from us when there is one minute left, then be automatically returned to the main room with that time is up.
- The **listeners** will take turns, to each share one item that you noticed, in response to one of the three questions.
 - As a group, try to make sure that someone addresses each question. (Don’t all focus on the same question, unless that’s all you’ve got.)
- Invite the **storyteller** to respond, for example:
 - Do you agree that this was an important part of the experience?
 - Do you agree that it’s classified correctly?
 - For “something missing”: was there something else you could add to the story?
- Invite the **entire group** to discuss:
 - For items that “didn’t seem to fit,” can you suggest how they might fit?
 - Or, can you suggest some general concept that needs to be **added** to the model, to give them a place to fit?
 - Are there parts of the model that seem to be “**extra**” or not very important?
 - Did the process of applying the model **change the way that you thought** about the experience?
- As you discuss, see if there’s any **one specific detail** that initially seems hard to make sense of (whether you figure it out in the end, or not), that you can share with the entire seminar:
 - Select one person to be the spokesperson for the group, who can briefly and clearly explain, to the larger seminar, what happened and what (if anything) you decided.

After about a half hour (two rounds of story telling and analysis), we’ll bring everyone back to the main room, to take stock of what we’ve learned.

As reminder, here are some of the **key parts of our model**:

Faith – Truth – Love – Faith.

Purification (or Separation) – Instruction – Completion.

Some other concepts from our discussion, which may help:

Epistemic change (in knowledge/understanding).

Personal change (in values/priorities/etc.).