

## **Excerpts from Parker Palmer's "The Clearness Committee"**

5. ....ask honest, open questions..... no advice and no amateur psychoanalysis. It means no, "Why don't you...?" It means no, "That happened to me one time, and here's what I did..." It means no, "There's a book/therapist/exercise/diet that would help you a lot." ...just real questions, honest and open questions, questions that will help the focus person remove the blocks to his or her inner truth without becoming burdened by the personal agendas of committee members. I may think I know the answer to your problem, and on rare occasions I may be right. But my answer is absolutely no value to you. The only answer that counts is one that arises from your own inner truth. The discipline of the Clearness Committee is to give you greater access to that truth and allow you to have a personal dialogue with it—while the rest of us refrain from trying to define that truth for you or guide that dialogue.

6. What is an honest, open question? It is important to reflect on this, since we are so skilled at asking questions that are advice or analysis in disguise; e.g., "Have you ever thought that it might be your mother's fault?" The best single mark of an honest, open question is that the questioner could not possibly anticipate the answer to it; e.g., "Did you ever feel like this before?" There are other guidelines for good questioning. Try not to get ahead of the focus person's language; e.g., "What did you mean when you said 'frustrated'?" is a good question, but "Didn't you feel angry?" is not. Ask questions aimed at helping the focus person rather than at satisfying your curiosity. Ask questions that are brief and to the point rather than larding them with background considerations and rationale—which make the question into a speech. Ask questions that go to the person as well as the problem—for example, questions about feelings as well as about facts. Trust your intuition in asking questions, even if your instinct seems off the wall; e.g., "What color is your present job, and what color is the one you have been offered?"

8. The Clearness Committee must not become a grilling or cross-examination. The pace of the questioning is crucial—it should be relaxed, gentle, humane. A machine-gun volley of questions makes reflection impossible and leaves the focus person feeling attacked rather than evoked. Do not be afraid of silence in the group—trust it and treasure it. If silence falls, it does not mean that nothing is happening or that the process has broken down. It may well mean that the most important thing of all is happening: new insights are emerging from within people, from their deepest sources of guidance.

11. Remember, the Clearness Committee is not intended to fix the focus person, so there should be no sense of letdown if the focus person does not have his or her problems "solved" when the process ends. A good clearness process does not end—it keeps working within the focus person long after the meeting is over. The rest of us need simply to keep holding that person in the light, trusting the wisdom of his or her inner teacher.

## **Excerpts from "A Hidden Wholeness" by Parker Palmer**

"In particular, we must learn to hold the tension between the reality of the moment and the possibility that something better might emerge."

"Ultimately, what drives us to resolve tension as quickly as we possibly can is the fear that if we hold it too long, it will break our hearts... Imagine the heart broken into shards and scattered about - a feeling most of us know, and a fate we would like to avoid. The other is to imagine the heart broken open into new capacity - a process that is not without pain but one that many of us would welcome."