



Lifting the Veil: Legacy and Transformation in Group Relations

AKRI Dialogues

Thursday, March 18, 2021 – Sunday, March 21, 2021

*“...The veil that clouds your eyes shall be lifted by the hands that wove it,
And the clay that fills your ears shall be pierced by those fingers that kneaded it.
And you shall see
And you shall hear.
Yet you shall not deplore having known blindness, nor regret having been deaf.
For in that day you shall know the hidden purpose in all things,
And you shall bless darkness as you would bless light....” - Kahlil Gibran*

You are warmly invited to attend AKRI’s biennial Dialogues entitled, “Lifting the Veil: Legacy and Transformation in Group Relations”. Continuing in the tradition of previous AKRI Dialogues, this meeting is intended for people who have attended at least one Group Relations Conference, and who want to contribute, explore and influence the discourse of group relations practitioners in their fields.

The world’s awakening to a new consciousness regarding racial injustice has also brought a reawakening to the Veil, a constant view of self through historical perspective that shields the self from a more complex (and complete) reality.. Call it white supremacy, patriarchy, caste system, religion, fluidity, oppression, wokeness, or even nothing at all. Regardless, we do not see ourselves as we truly are, focusing instead on who we claim to be: our idealized selves, not our actual selves. To self- or communally- actualize so we may all become who we want and claim to be, we first must lift the Veil and acknowledge who we are.

To be honest, the solutions proposed to address racial injustice are still informed by the Veil. Personal role and social identities, centered and marginalized in Black Lives Matter conversations, seek fuller self-expression while still clutching narratives that reinforce those identities. The result is a constant power struggle for equality and justice so long as we insist on retaining narratives that reinforce identities viewed through the Veil.

The US is on the precipice of historic social, economic, and political changes that portend significant disruption to governance, if its citizens can acknowledge and lift the Veil. Expanding “who” finds space at the table and “how” participation is negotiated and received will be significant determinants of the extent to which the disruption succeeds. The consciousness of its citizens is vitalized by new possibilities that are simultaneously constructive and destructive - reshaping dialogue and giving life to new paradigms of thinking and practice. AKRI is subject to these same social, cultural, and political undercurrents. As an organization, it is struggling to envision its role as a leadership organization; The decisions that are made, and the directions chosen will determine whether and how it survives and thrives while engaging this new vortex of change.

Previously known as the Scientific Meeting, the Dialogues originally provided an opportunity for AKRI's membership to come together to present papers and panels about various aspects of Group Relations work. The theme of the March 2021 Dialogues, "Lifting the Veil: Legacy and Transformation in Group Relations", represents the next step in our ongoing conversation about AKRI.

We hope you will join us as we explore the legacy and the future of AKRI. The recent Zoom community meetings, initiated by the Board in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and then the George Floyd and Breonna Taylor killings and the increased visibility and activity of the Black Lives Matter movement, began the conversation but, as several members have acknowledged, 90, or even 120 minutes, is not sufficient to lift the Veil and explore beneath it to any great extent. We propose to use the first part of the Dialogues to focus on legacy, to identify the wisdom and learning we want to carry forward while also acknowledging and challenging "well worn grooves" and letting go of remnants from our past that do not serve the organization. This is an opportunity to have the conversations that we ordinarily avoid, to engage the shadows we might prefer to leave unexamined. By openly examining our history, and being willing to consider aspects that may have hurt or been less than useful to some, while benefiting others, by acknowledging what needs repair, what we have avoided or ignored, as well as what we want to retain and honor, we can begin to break the stasis that prevents us having honest and open interactions and limits our ability to recruit new attendees at conferences and members to AKRI.

After actively lifting the Veil and examining our underbelly together, we hope to move into a period of self- and other- forgiveness and acceptance so that, ultimately, we can consciously and openly integrate our past into a healthier, more flexible and welcoming organization. Transformation often occurs over multiple conversations and through many small actions. In the virtual rooms, presentations and encounters that comprise these Dialogues, we plan to identify and operationalize the necessary steps to develop an AKRI that knows, supports and implements its mission and lives its teachings. By applying what we have learned about organizations to ourselves, we can create a stronger and more competent AKRI, built on honesty, integrity, trust and inclusion.

There are benefits to meeting virtually (as appears likely at this time) that balance the obvious disappointment of not coming together physically as a group. It will allow the participation of individuals who ordinarily cannot afford the cost, in time and/or money, of flying to Chicago for an extended period. People who are caring for children or elders or who are unable to travel for other reasons, may be able to arrange their schedules to accommodate their responsibilities and still attend sessions. We look forward to a robust discussion with many 'aha' moments and ideas to strengthen and transform AKRI and the application of Group Relations technology to the greater world community. Please mark your calendars and plan to attend.

With much enthusiasm and excitement,

Dialogues Planning Committee

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