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the regular COLUMN

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This week I participated in an Open Forum called 'Deepening the Dialogue'. It was organised in the manner described by Arnold Mindell in his book *The Deep Democracy of Open Forums*. It was part of the Together for Peace festival in Leeds. I had been part of the team organising the event on the ground, making contacts locally, doing inner work on the issues that might arise, finding and getting to know all the roles within ourselves. A key issue we had worked with was that the initiative came from us, the process work community. I was quite nervous and, though I had a lot of confidence in our team of four experienced Process Work facilitators, had to keep reminding myself that whoever came would be the 'right people' for the process that would need to unfold.

About sixty people turned up, mostly white, even though we were holding the event in a community centre that predominantly serves an Asian, Muslim population. We had three speakers prepared to introduce a personal perspective – the second one, a Christian, took us straight to the heart of the matter with an angry challenge: 'What the fuck are you doing here!' directed at the facilitators and organisers.

I could feel myself taking it personally, wanting to apologise for ever supporting the idea; also feeling it was important to be here, but in my shock

not being able to say why. Following the London bombings in July people, the press in particular, had seen this area of Leeds as the problem, and we were maybe doing the same, even worse, offering salvation. This community others in Leeds had mobilised their own response in a way that increased community cohesion, without outside help. This was echoed by several statements of pride in the local community – clearly a message which needed to be heard by the outside world. Putting the question so forcibly enabled us all to ask 'what are we doing here?' and then came some answers. The diversity in the room began to emerge, and the needs of the wider world for learning and connection.

Then came an intimate acknowledgment of deep and long lasting friendship between an Asian and a white woman, in the face of family opposition. Thus we got to the main point for me personally, that the underlying 'evil' in our midst is *racism*, and that this in our culture is something white people must deal with. So the right people were here. An elderly Chinese man spoke of the racism and abuse he continues to experience – there is much to apologise for.

The final part was an opportunity to network in small groups – the room was buzzing. The intensity of dialogue said to me that something important had happened.