When Upset Arises during a Meeting
(thanks to participants in BC Intensive #6)

When strong emotions arise in a meeting, there is a judgement call to be made: Do we go into this or not? The answer depends on a bunch of factors, which are listed here under #1, along with a bit of advice in general. Then if it turns out that the judgement call is not to go into it, you need to know how to lay it aside (#2). Finally, if you are going into it, there is guidance for how to do that (#3).

1. Making the judgment call: To go into an emotionally charged issue or not?

What's the purpose of this group?
Assessing connection between this distress and group's purpose, does this conflict have value for the group?
Helps to know tolerance of group, have a feel for group "culture" ahead of time; How does this fit into our group history?
How does this fit with agenda, format?
What is the depth of relationship in the room?

Do people have energy for this?
Is this recurring? What's the timing? Who is it?
Outburst can be unintentionally manipulative
Can be useful for person to be helped to "hold their energy"
Extenuating circumstances for individuals can be or need to be taken into account
Need for community to deal with personal growth
Individual needs may indicate a group need/issue to learn from, can the group be curious?
What are the community's boundaries
Is person a lightning rod for group?
What is the emotional state of the main players, can they handle it?

Will going deeper serve the group? (Know the group and/or seek direction) Can we do this well, intelligently? Can we create a relatively safe container?
Would it be better handled in private?
For the person who is facilitating, what is your own capacity for this? Are you triggered or biased?

It is almost always useful and appropriate to acknowledge the tension that has arisen, whether or not you choose to go into it
Name the diversity that likely exists between people who find the emotional intensity exciting vs. scary
Be transparent about your rationale (for going into it or not)
The group really does have a choice
Suggesting alternatives
Sometimes taking a break helps in providing more time to decide or privacy to consult

2. How to lay aside if *not* going into it

Help energy flow, even if you say "no" for now
Speak from place of compassion (for individual, for group, for yourself)
Help individual to take responsibility, become pro-active
Suggest alternatives, such as:
    a. one or few people step aside to offer support now
    b. one or more people meet with person later, or take to a committee if there is an appropriate one
    c. schedule for future whole group attention when group has energy
Rest of group must have choice so they don't feel held hostage
Listen for *content* that's in the emotion, don't just respond to delivery
Check in with the person later
Facilitator must be aware of own triggers and blind spots

3. How to handle it if you are going deeper into the distress

Be clear on how it connects to purpose, why are we going into this
Help person stay grounded (including using physical proximity & eye contact)
Need clear boundaries, reassure group that it won't go on forever
Facilitator may need to move from head to heart facilitation OR ask someone else (e.g. co-facilitator) to step in
Come from a place of genuine care for all involved
Ask group for direction, don't feel like you have to have all the answers as facilitator
Ask individual for direction
Trust your instincts
Let charge happen and sit in group
Meet the energy intensity of the individual
Find balance of involving others, so attention is shared
Check in occasionally about how the process is going, and adjust in response as needed
Be transparent
Working deeply may spark resonance with others —> chaos may erupt which takes strong skills
Going deeper eventually hits world issues that group can learn from