

the bridge

Dialogues Across Cultures

Edited by Talia Levine Bar-Yoseph

Foreword by Mackie Blanton



IX. COEXISTENCE IN THE HOLY LAND

By Sa'ed Tali, M.A. and Oshrat Mizrahi Shapira, M.A.

Introduction

Tense and frightening are the streets outside; while inside there is turbulence, even though the sky is clear. We know not if this is the right time for dialogue. Perhaps dialoguing is not a luxury at a time like this, but it's certainly a necessity. There are people who need to talk when in conflict and especially when there are others who believe that they need to fight. Conflicts, we must stress, are not an invention of the Jews nor the Palestinians. They have accompanied humankind since Genesis. Cain's murdering Abel was a sign of the beginning of humanity's inhumanity, when one has become overwhelmed with conflict. Two are enough, at times even one, for a struggle to erupt. Cain and Abel had the entire globe, yet the end of their story was tragic.

We claim that there is a deep layer that creates conflict beyond and above the political, sociological, geographic levels that connect one's personal identity to more identities. Thus the motives that mold conflicts between groups and the identities themselves have to be explored not only through an external, political field, but also an intra-psychic field.

In recent years, there have been a number of attempts to map Arab-Jewish relationship groups struggling to relate to one another (Cahanov & Katz, 1990; Steinberg, 2002). Aiming to categorize how personal relationships between group participants form, Steinberg bases his attempts mainly on recent human contact theory (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew, 1998), noting that once members of opposing groups establish personal acquaintances, inclinations in stereotypical perception, stance, and relations will shift. The weakness of opposing groups emerges when they avoid the realistic politics of the power relations outside the groups, in the field. Though dialogue at a meeting place can change viewpoint and stance, it does not always take into account the field perspective as a whole.

One also notes that in groups where there is a collective identity, the collective identity, underlain initially by an asymmetric power relation, evolves to give weight to the entire field experience itself, based on trust and friendship between participants, in order to mitigate opposing power struggles between two phenomenological fields and to create more optimal social relationships.

A third type of group is the story-telling group in which participants share personal stories with one another. The personal story evokes personal histories, including the collective history that groups with initial asymmetric power should want to arrive at eventually, and at the same time creates personal relationships. In this group, it is possible to explore the stereotypes in each member in relation to the other members. This group is a culmination of the field context and the personal history/story, enabling in the end a dialogic relationship while taking into account the total holistic experience residing internally in each member. Cahanov and Katz (1990), observing groups as workshop participants, sub-divide groups in light of their conflicts:

Human relations workshops: focusing on heightening individual awareness of feelings about members of other groups, of one's behavior when with them, and the impact of this behavior on the other group members (Back, 1972; Benne, Bradford, Gibb, and Lippitt, 1975).

Intercultural study workshops: focusing on understanding the influences their culture has on oneself and on one's other, and on the perception of the self and the possible mutuality that might emerge among people in conflict (Triandis, 1983).

Conflict resolution and negotiation workshops: creating dialogue around the working assumption that there is a real conflict of interests between the two sides. Techniques that are more suitable for decision makers and less for educators interested in personal growth are preferable (Burton, 1969; Kelman, 1979).

How we approach our group work is always evolving and hasn't reached its final form. Our approach is influenced more from the standpoint of human-relations workshops and aims to heighten awareness on the behavioral and emotional realm.

Our Own Initial Meeting

Our meeting one another happened as a coincidence -- or maybe not. Community theatre director Oshrat, a Jew from the Middle East, who perceives herself as a Jewish Arab, approached a group facilitator, Sa'ad, an Arab who defines himself as a Palestinian Israeli citizen, and suggested that they establish and co-facilitate a dialogue group in the Theatre Department of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Oshrat had three years of experience at that time facilitating an Arab-Jewish theatre group in a mixed town, Ramle, in Israel. She felt that leading such a group is charged and complex, when mixed. It was essential to her to bring in a professional group facilitator/psychologist.

We decided to work together, even though at face value we had nothing in common: a man and a woman, an Arab Muslim and an Arab Jew, from different professional fields. In time, we discovered we also have fundamental personal differences. "Oshrat is a spontaneous extrovert actively facing outward," as Sa'ad muses, while he sees himself to be "a held-back/contained introvert, who mainly observes." Oshrat believes more in indirect work through theatre while Sa'ad prefers direct and unmediated communication through the group dynamics."

In spite of these starting positions, something pushed us to start the journey. At this initial stage we couldn't imagine how long and winding the road to integration between our own intricate parts would be. Later on, we reached the insight that in differences between us lies the secret of the power of co-facilitation, and on this point rests the uniqueness of our work.

At first, though, the difference between us was the threatening factor that highlighted the conflict. At a later stage, parallel to the group work we conducted alternately, we came upon a struggle and a dialogue at the end of which we acquired security in the uniqueness of each one of us and in our ability to accept the other. This recognition of security and acceptance enables us to produce a more harmonious conduct and a richer facilitation that we both utilize. Constantly, we re-drafted the advantages and qualities we both possess, thereby creating a whole experience. There are parallel vectors between the process we went through as a facilitation unit and the process we are trying to lead in our groups. As a pair we had to bridge differences, accept the other as is, including the right to exist in order to find mutual interest, as we maintained the wish to work as a unit, and as a whole, with our groups in conflict. Wholeness derives from a meeting between two separate entities.

The Group Framework

The group is a part of an academic workshop in the Department of Theatre at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. In practice, the workshop is

conducted in a theatre situated on the line separating Eastern (Arab) and Western (Jewish) Jerusalem.

The Rationale

The aim of the groups that we facilitate is to help the participants to observe and to explore through a theatrical vehicle the motives and the psychological aspects of life in the shadow of the Jewish-Arab conflict. The emphasis is mainly on the interpersonal functioning of the group and the raw material entails the here and now of personal experiences, feelings, and thoughts that the participants bring up. Our interventions, including the theatrical experiments, are on the level of group processes, created to facilitate communication and relations between people. We encourage free expression of feeling and personal exposure, in the wish to create trust relationships across the original groups. We evoke stories that will later be the basis for the final theatrical event.

The final event is supposed to reflect and expose the meaningful processes that happened in the group both on the personal and on the group level. The performance is an invitation to the life of the group up to the time of the event: the conflicts and the tensions, the hopes and the peace-making. The performance describes a meeting between Arabs and Jews through milestones symbolizing the nature of the relationship and the dynamics that a meeting like this entails.

The Target Population

Our target population comprises students from universities in Jerusalem and Jewish and Palestinian citizens of the city. Typical characteristics of the Jewish Israeli population is that they are twenty-two to thirty year-old Ashkenazi left-wingers, including one 50 year-old gentleman. The typical characteristic of the Palestinian participants is that most of them are students between nineteen to twenty-two years of age, both Muslim and Christian, from Arab villages in the north of Israel.

The Group

Running successfully for approximately six years now, our workshop meets its participants once a week for a three-hour session that is dedicated to personal and team work revolving around the conflict and working through conversation and theatrical exercises. It is in this arena of the work that the materials of the performance crystallize and in which the members develop acting skills. This is the most central of the three stages/phases and lasts approximately 4 months (16 sessions).

The Rehearsals

The participants meet twice a week for the duration of three hours in preparation for putting up the show. The rehearsals are not disconnected from the group process and they include within them discussions and reflections on the process on the personal level, the interpersonal level, and the group level. The main tool in this reflective process is that of acting and working through of the dynamics that evolve through group work.

The Performance

Taking place in the village of Neve Shalom (Oasis of Peace) or at The Khun (The Lodge) in Jerusalem, the final show is the culmination of the process in that it is a meeting point between performers and audience. This performance marks the joint effort of Arabs and Jews to achieve a common goal and to accomplish a personal and communal success. The show acts as the

closing of a cycle, but it is differentiated from the beginning of the process in that here is a real togetherness based on a true and authentic knowing of each other. The group process draws a line between two poles – that of the starting point of conflict and the other of the ensuing polarity, the performance itself, which is the articulation of the bridging of the divides. The rehearsals are the route, the journey from one polarity to the other.

Beyond the gain to the group members, the performance evokes thought in the viewer, and takes the audience on a journey similar to the one undertaken by the team members. The viewer, through the performance, is opened to introspection about his or her place in society and about his or her feelings in the current reality of the conflict.

At the end of the show, there is an interactive session led by the group facilitators and its aim is to allow both audience and participants to share their feelings and reactions to the performance.

Workshop Objective

Our objective of the workshop is as follows:

1. The sessions will guide the participants into a journey toward their chosen personal identity, including their self-declared national identity. This journey will lead their soul through a meeting process in which their representative self also meets their other. Our goal is that by the end of the journey, they will re-own at least some of the projections they stored internally toward the other.
2. The group itself will enable the participants to enter a state of introspection so that they may confront the consequences of dealing with the Jewish-Palestinian conflict.
3. Over time, the participants will create a theatrical performance that reflects and exposes meaningful events and processes that happened in the group on the personal and group level. This performance event is kind of a window into the life of the group, into its journey of conflicts, tensions, excitements, and peace-making. The play will evoke thought and stimulate the observers to conduct similar meetings in which the main characteristic is acceptance of the other and mutual respect.
4. The theatrical event is to be aesthetic and highly professional.

The Group Structure

The group is in session for six months and is constructed of three elements: the group itself, rehearsals based on the group's dynamics, and the final performance. Fifteen people participate in the team, two thirds of whom are Jews and one third of whom are Palestinians. The women in the group outnumber the men.

A meeting between Jews and Arabs at this time and age entails high potential for explosion. Hence, the level of anxiety is very high. Defense mechanisms are in full bloom at the service of the ego, with the ego often impacting the defenses at play. These meetings quickly become a battlefield of blaming and attacks heightening the conflict that is already inherent to the group by definition. Below are a few of the common mechanisms across the different groups we have facilitated:

1. **Splitting and Projection:** experiencing aggression as if it resides within the field, a participant will excuse him/herself from the aggressive feelings emerging from within the group ("My sub-group is ideal; the other is inferior!").

2. **Projective Identification:** each member has a role in relation to another member. It's therefore possible to observe certain processes of intellectual, cultural, or sexual seduction intended to entice another to become part of the group.
3. **Generalization and Stereotypes.**
4. **Denial.**
5. **Scapegoating:** each sub-group searches for a scapegoat to pile on its own sins. "The goat" often is a participant who behaves in a fashion that contradicts one's sense of group rules as a whole and at times bluntly expresses feelings and values directly. At the first phase, the scapegoat that the Jews and Palestinians unite to kill is the facilitators; to be precise: Sa'ad, the one responsible at this time for the group dynamic underway. During this phase, Sa'ad is pushing towards the direction of a dialogue about the conflict in progress; hence, he is perceived as threatening to shake the fragile, cold peace between the two groups.

The Stages of Constructing the Group

We assume that there are a number of reasons for the fact that more Jews than Arabs come to the gatherings:

1. The lack of trust the Arab has in the ability of these groups to offer real change in the socio-political situation.
2. The Arabs' distrust and suspicion concerning any event related to the Israeli/Jewish establishment. Any activity involving Jews is perceived as related to the establishment.
3. Any dialogue with Jews against the ground of the escalation in the relationship between the Arabs and the Jews is perceived as collaboration with the Jews.
4. The theatre as a foreign and a threatening tool for the Arab society.

The theatre has an element of externalizing and of exposure, which makes it, in the eye of the Arab society, indecent, especially if women are involved.

On top of these four factors, some of the Arab participants are suspicious about the Arab facilitator and perceive him as a collaborator and as weak in relation to the Jewish female facilitator, who is anyway more active on the theatrical front. On the other hand, as facilitators, we highlight the protective elements of the theatre and, as well, an equal presence and functioning between the Arab and the Jewish facilitator.

The fashion in which we choose our participants impacts the process of the work. We are aware of the difference between the different needs and expectations of the Jews and the Arabs as well as their needs and expectations as individuals, once we come to know them well. We try to create a spirit and sense of an organized unity, allowing differences as well as drawing clear boundaries. The field (the external reality) takes over and intervenes in every stage in the life of the group.

From the start, we understand that the textbook way of facilitation cannot be followed. For example, even at the preliminary stage of creating the group, we courted the Arabs and invited them to join in any way, while with the Jews we were strict to a degree of giving them screening exams. We accept this situation as given even as we move away from a place of potential discrimination. The Jewish participants collaborate with the facilitators and make allowance to the Arabs because they too want them to stay. In time, they allow themselves to express anger and frustration about this self-imposed initial

equality, which later on proves to be a developmental evolutionary aspect of the group.

Getting Started

Group had twelve Jewish members, eight Arabs. The opening phase was short, one to two meetings. It was characterized on the one end of the polarity with which we started by optimism and euphoria and on the other by anxiety and suspicion. The participants, as if briefly reborn, are delighted to belong to a special group that has chosen life as a reason for being together. The facilitators were delighted to have brought another child to the world. Group members felt that they had entered an island of peace and sanity situated in a field of insanity and a hopeless war.

They expressed wishes and hope to know one another and to make peace amongst themselves. Membership in the group is initiated by an invitation or suggestion to feel joy to be participating in a circle where something producing euphoria might get done. However, typically, joy is quickly delayed, and euphoria quickly held back, by paranoia and by dependency on the facilitators.

We begin every session with a circle of associations and monologues. Touching upon the phenomenology of each member allows an authentic meeting between individual participants. The members of the two teams are invited to share with the group their feeling, thoughts and personal stories. This part of the session lasts approximately fifteen minutes and its aim is to create a "soft landing" from the exterior reality into the group circle and to provide a personal arena to each member to share personal issues with the group, and for the group to get to know each of its members on a personal level.

After this, we begin preparing for the theatrical work; our preparation is made up of warming-up exercises and exercises whose aim is to teach acting skills in addition to the work on the personal and communal materials. All the dramatic exercises are made to fit the pace of developmental work, both from the material point of view, the dynamic point of view, and from the point of view of arriving at the creation of the final dramatic performance. The theatrical work lasts for about an hour and a half. After a break, we reconvene to another open group discussion in circle form that lasts about an hour.

So we began this phase with what we call an identity experiment. Group members were asked to wander around the room and tell their identity to a member they meet and then, in turn, to listen to the rendition of the person whom they have just met.

As they move on to encounter another new person, each member is asked to adopt the identity of the person they had just met. And thus the journey of meetings in the room continued, every meeting containing a swapping of identity. "The experiment ends," we pointed out, "when you wind up meeting the person who carries your very own identity." We distinctly remember the sensation of freedom when all identities are mixed in the room; for this brought about a recognition of similarity following upon when each person had first lost his or her identity and had come to feel a loss of personal meaning. Hence, an evolving communal identity seemed stronger than an initiating personal identity and, of course, a loss of personal identity.

At the next stage, participants were divided into two groups according to nationality, Palestinian and Israeli. Each group was then requested to design three kinetic sculptures relating to their given perceived situation, to their desired situation and to the perceived possible. The room filled with objections and fierce looks of "Don't spoil the joy!" We discovered the difficulty in containing the stormy tempers and anxiety of the group. On one hand, we were to be empathic and containers for projections (transference); on the

other, we were to be managers and function to maintain holding the group together -- all the while remember our own task of bringing together a presentation at the end of the path of this dialogic, multiple-voiced journey.

Creative Spontaneity

Initiating a session, preparing for further sessions, rehearsing experiential scripts, and bridging sessions, to say the least, can result in gruesome and awesome self-reflection. At times, such descending self-reflection produces unrehearsed creative spontaneity. We believe that it is times like these when a participant is trying to break through feeling hypocritical. We have two such examples of creative spontaneity; one involving a poem; the other, a silver ribbon.

A Poem

Social Ice Cream is a social protest poem, it reflects a rising awareness of a wish to move from pseudo-togetherness to a relationship. *Social Ice Cream* is a brave attempt to break the ice through 'sweet talk' which both covers the horror of conflict and expresses the painful wish for closeness.

"Social Ice Cream"

I want to eat something.
 I want sweetness, like an ice cream sandwich.
 Yes, sit on the soft sand on the beach and lick ice cream.
 Politically correct flavored ice cream.
 To taste the white part,
 And the black,
 The strength of the biscuit,
 The softness of the cream,
 To eat it all in gentle pluralistic movement of the tongue,
 And spread on top some humane sweet whipped cream.
 Without talking.
 Sprinkle some rice puffs on the poor,
 So I will not be able to see.
 And stuff glazed cherries in my ears,
 So I won't be able to hear.
 Fraternity ice cream, peace ice cream, justice ice cream
 Oh boy, I'm melting!

Noa's (female Jew) muffled sobbing merged with the silence of the group. Slowly members focused on her. Fidgeting, embarrassed looks slowly fill and overwhelm the room until Noa's tears occupied the entire group's attention and magnetized it. When we say *group*, we mean the entire field – chairs, participants and facilitators, gazes, postures, movement of the air and the light in the room.

All the eyes and minds turned to the facilitators: on one hand, blaming; on the other, anticipating their actions, hoping they would release the group from the sadness and discomfort that took over the room. The facilitators invite Noa to speak the tears and share what she feels with the group. Noa doesn't co-operate, as if saying, "Leave me alone, I can't!" and leaves the room. Long silence preceded a phase of objections and rejections. We understand the silence as an expression of difficulty, paralysis, often overtaking the group. The paralysis and silence, frustration and anger, created difficulties that got expressed more at the dialogic moment between the two groups. Later on, we would see that at the theatrical part where this moment was to be

scripted, the anxiety and the difficulties were expressed in the content of the rehearsal of the performance and the performance itself.

Both in the theatre performance and during the dialogic layers beforehand, the two teams objected through expressions of polarized national identity. And any mention of national identity evoked discomfort. The facilitators, at this stage, drew most of the negative feeling, as they were the ones that divided the group into Jews and Arabs, were meticulous about time boundaries, and tried to shed light on places the group was invested in to keep in the dark. The members, all entrenched in suffering and overwhelmed by anxiety of events in the external field, were concerned that the meeting between the national identities inside the group as well as outside would create a painful struggle. Hence, they expressed joint preference for a meeting clear of any national identity in order to prevent pain, scare, and anxiety.

This incident of the poem was a much needed creative adjustment so that they would strengthen enough and develop enough self-support to hold them through *their moments of meeting with difference and the different*. The negative energy was aimed at the facilitators; there was almost no expression of hostility to the members. The facilitators were the object of all projections that demanded a huge amount of strength from facilitators and participants and endless attempts to understand why during dialogue and growth. They also required responses from one another on questions such as, *What were we supposed to do? Were we on the right path?*

After a considerable effort, the group was composed. Then off it went through dialogue on a mutual journey, the end of which no participant or trainer knew beforehand. A Palestinian-Israeli dialogic group currently is like a long period of treatment after having given birth to a damaged baby. The two facilitators are the parents of a sick child.

A Silver Ribbon

Another intriguing moment involved the incident of a silver ribbon. The spontaneity did not involve the perpetrator of the event as much as it did the other participants and the facilitators. The group had just started, a minute had passed, and one of the facilitators invited the entire group to open with a personal dialogue. Another minute or two of silence passed. Suddenly, Shaul got up, pulled a silver ribbon out of his pocket, and stood staring at the facilitators.

The silence continued. Shaul started to surround his fellow participants and threaded the ribbon between the group members and the facilitators, and then around them, creating a web of ribbon between everyone in the room. The sensation was of being trapped in a web, tied to a chair, tied to the group, and tied to its phenomenology. Giggling started and then reactions of surprise.

The group members encouraged Shaul with no objection. Shaul, once he finished his mission, exclaimed, "I'm not pleased with what's happening in this group. There are too many divisions, alienation and negative feeling that I feel. I would have liked people to come closer to one another. We are all human beings. I am pessimistic about this group and have even considered leaving. I debated seriously whether to arrive here today or not."

A Greek chorus was spontaneously created, expressing, even singing, its discontentment and disappointment with how the content of the day's group was developing: as if to say, "This is not the meeting we anticipated!" as they pointed a finger at the facilitators.

The following meeting started again with an open invitation to personal dialogue. We were wondering whether some of the participants would recapture the experience of the last meeting and share their feelings about it. But that was not to be. Their feelings deflected into other directions, but

eventually, even so, a group resolution was reached, resulting in greater, memorable cohesion. That encounter went something like this:

Shalom (male Jew): "I left the previous meeting disappointed and frustrated. I came here with a lot of good intentions to meet Arab friends, learn and hear what they are saying. I think that I, myself, and the rest of the Jewish group members show empathy and understanding to the Arab side, even though they speak about tough things and they express difficult things that are hard for me to understand, like an empathy with terror. But we don't hear any understanding or get any listening or empathy from the Arab group towards our story."

Fadia (female Arab): "You will never understand what we are talking about! The Arab situation is much more difficult. Do you have any idea what it is like to arrive here, to the Hebrew University, from Ramallah, a Palestinian city, or not to sleep at night because of bombs? What the hell are you talking about?!"

Umayma (female Arab): "Enough! This discussion will take us nowhere. From meeting to meeting I feel we miss the point. I came in order to make theatre and to meet people, and we are not doing it."

The feeling in the room was generally that there was wall-to-wall agreement with what Umayma had said, and there was general desperation on the facilitators' side. But then:

Shalom (male Jew): "Let's do something else; let's take responsibility for what's happening here."

Dina (female Jew): "Maybe every meeting somebody will take responsibility to lead an activity."

Galit (female Jew): "We need to ask the facilitators, maybe it's impossible"

Shalom (male Jew): "There is no reason for the facilitators to object, we have the right to do it."

Irit (female Jew): "I suggest meditation"

Dina (female Jew): "Cool."

All group members agreed with the direction the conversation was now going and seemed enthusiastic. A spirit of elation took over from the gloom. They discussed whether their facilitators would agree to their plan or not. We joined in on this pacified moment, enabling this spirit of the meeting, and became part of it through allowing the group to experiment with a different experience of crowning a new leader, so to speak, for they accepted Ella's recommendation that we meditate.

The group meditated in silence for a few minutes, and was rather satisfied with itself. Then silence descended once again. Stuckness, as we say, seemed to be where we were now. There seemed to be no new suggestions forthcoming. Confusion seeped in. Eyes once again turned towards the facilitators. Even though the open declarations were about the wish to create theatre and to speak through it, in reality objections appeared also during the theatrical activity later on. There was a gap between fantasy and reality.

However, objections here weren't that primal and fundamental, but suggested a difficulty to connect to the language in the room that was beginning to expose their feelings about the content of the theatrical mission, as their sense of an emerging script was connected to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. There was no getting around the conflict they brought with them on the first day.

The emerging script provided every Jew and Arab in the group a setting to present and to expose their feelings, values, and ways of coping. It was possible to witness the theatre as a road bypassing dangerous areas and direct conflict, enabling us to continue a less dangerous journey.

A less dangerous journey, of course, was an objective of ours, but one built on communal spiritedness, not communal avoidance. The following is an example for an interpersonal meeting between two individuals from the two different subgroups. It is a part of a theatrical presentation by a Jewish and an Arab female participant.

Dialogue between Identities

Suddenly out of the darkness of the room, an Arab participant comes on stage. She was a slim woman, who hardly ever talked before, and did not appear to be very eloquent at first. She presented to us a girl memorizing the multiplication table: "Eight times one is eight, eight times two is sixteen, eight times three is twenty four, eight times four thirty two, eight times five forty, eight times six -- eight times six My father cannot tolerate or hear the number forty-eight. Do you know why?" she asks us in anguish. ("1948 is the year of the war of independence in Israel," a translator comments).

"Mum once said to Dad," she continues: 'Abu Ali, I got you trousers, size 48. Do they suit you?' Do you know what happened? He grabbed the pants and threw them out the window! I cannot forget that day! I ran to the window looked down and saw someone taking the pants. Ever since that time, my dad lies in bed without pants, naked. It is forbidden to wear pants size 48. Forbidden to wear shoes size 48. Forbidden to celebrate his 48th birthday, this year! Le `esh ("why" in Arabic, translator?) 'Why does Dad behave like this?' I asked the doctors. One day I looked and found his diary."

She Read From the Diary:

"The year 1948, the place Dir Yassin. The time - a disaster. That day mama was hugging me and the hug started to move away from me. Mama, Mama, what are you holding in your hand? Mama, who are the strangers? Why are there dead bodies, what are you holding? You are hugging a pillow instead of me! I started to cry, my tears rose from one Arab village, which was damaged by the Israelis, to the next." (He enumerated the names of the villages in his diary, the translator explained to us through her narrative.) "Since then my father sleeps without pants and without a pillow."

Overwhelming clapping and excitement broke out when she ended her monolog. It was a surprising and astonishing event. This almost muted young woman finally felt able to talk in the group. We witnessed that day that a sensation of understanding was created even for an Arab girl who talked haltingly in her language about the Palestinian villages that they were destroyed.

Another meeting between differences happened when a religious Jewish woman wearing a white dress, her head covered with a scarf, came onto the stage: yet again a very quiet participant, we observed.

She started to sing the Anthem of the State of Israel. Her face expressed the endless journey of the Jews as she sang the pain and the Jewish distress, for *Hatikva* (The Hope), the Anthem, contains more helplessness and pain than hope.

From the point of view of masculine conflict itself, these two feminist expressions would always seem weak and childlike; and soft rather than attacking, spiteful, and rigid. Yet these two women possessed for us the power to expose and to present the height of the conflict from personal, different experiences.

Emerging Cohesion

These two feminist pieces managed to penetrate the walls separating the two subgroups, and to land us safely in the enemy territory. The Arab

participants testified that this was for them the first time ever that they could listen to the Jewish State Anthem and let go of their anger, hatred, and hurt because it was so Jewish, and did not therefore include them. For the first time they were able to connect and to understand, and not be bothered that were not included. They were open enough to understand the pain and distress of their other – the Jew.

The Jewish participants expressed the same spirit and sentiment after the Arab woman had narrated her father's entry in his diary about the Arab villages.

For us, the facilitators, this is the meaning of a dialogic relationship that we seek to instill in our group clients. There and then we felt as well as they, and understood, that a dialogue was born. The road to collaboration between the subgroups was paved. The rehearsals for the final presentation could commence. And we could now take our show on the road -- to Neve Shalom.

An Oasis of Peace

Neve Shalom (Oasis of Peace) is a village of both Jews and Arabs in the center of Israel. It is a place dedicated to the enhancement of peace and to proving that co-existence is both fertile and possible. In Neve Shalom, there is The School for Peace that is founded on the assumption that the conflict between Arabs and Jews is a conflict between two peoples of two national identities, and not between two individuals. We accept this assumption, although we claim that it doesn't provide a holistic enough explanation of the process leading to this conflict. Hence, those whose work for peace is based systematically on this assumption are conducting only a partial task of connecting the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to the concept of national identities.

We ourselves attempt to expand on this concept of national identities by suggesting that the motive behind inter-group conflict and national identity is connected to differing ethos, in each case, tied to psychological identities inherent in the different groups that, in turn, create a different group dynamic. Different psychological forces of identity impact the emergence of a differing dynamic. One of these different forces is national identity, but by it is by no means the only one. More forces exist in the Palestinian-Israeli etiology of conflict.

At the end of the day, all possible psychological forces together override mere national identity, generating either war or peace between geopolitical national identities. We can see that this hypothesis accounts more forcefully for conflicts in the region when we broaden the field of observation to include groups of people of the region, or finer distinctions among groups, that we are not here concentrating on at this time, such as the Druze, Christians (Orthodox, Catholics, Protestants, Armenians), Jews (Orthodox, non-Orthodox, Sephardic, Ashkenazi), and Muslims (Shi'a, Sunni, Sufi).

At this stage of our group's journey, some of the participants *got off the bus*, so to speak, demurring, having chosen to stay behind; some, speaking metaphorically and psychologically, sat next to the door, and some found a seat way at the back. This is how *the bus of their attitude* left the station. Sometimes not very united, or much less jolly than at the beginning and therefore more apprehensive, our group was nonetheless going on a journey. They were now a lot more sober and realistic; the optimistic part stemmed from the fact that at the end of the day they did choose to travel. By now the contact among participants in the group was a bit closer to each individual's awareness. They had, after all, decided on a common activity of their own choosing.

Our fellow travelers on the bus included Arabs communally preoccupied with thinking about their home, or that of their neighbors or other family members, that had been demolished; missing it, longing for it, and being very angry at the Jews whom they saw as responsible for the destruction. Our fellow travelers also included a few Jews, Ashkenazi Jews, individualistic in their turmoil about their own personal, psychological issues.

At this, our eighth session of the group workshop, in Neve Shalom it was possible for us to observe the beginnings of a connection within the group as a whole to their multiple identities through the psychological dynamic of the Arab sub-group. When we observed this connection taking shape, we started the theatre exercises with relaxation exercises and guided imagery about *one's home*. The relaxation guided us towards objects, smells, colors, and other content of one's house called home. Every participant was requested to choose one object from the house that would tell its own story. Afterwards, Arabs and Jews created a mutual scene under the inspiration of the objects.

The Arabs connected to their nationality, while the Jews spoke as individuals. The Jewish group had a house and it was busy exploring feelings inside the home: frustration, restlessness, and interpersonal matters. The Arab group chose one story expressing longing for *house* and *home*. For the Arabs, *house* and *home* were conflated as a single concept and principle.

The theatrical presentation of the Jews was what we would call a host's show presented for a guest audience in mind, and included personal interviews of the participants in it. For example, we learned that *A's* home evoked the presence of people within it, and she searched for the people she loved. *Four* physical walls of a dwelling were not significant to her, she insisted. *S*, interested in ecology, narrated his story through the eyes of a plant in the garden outside of the house. *M* dealt with personal difficulties by narrating the life of a lawn surrounding a house, as it were the lawn that experiences difficulties when being stepped on. For Jews, *house* and *home* reflected clear, separate realities.

The Arab participants debated for the first time whether to present their performance in Hebrew or in Arabic and settled on Arabic. Keep in mind that the Jewish group on the whole didn't have a grasp of Arabic. In Arabic, they crystallized their narrative, all participating in the presentation of a single story. They narrated the history of a demolished village, as told by a picture of a grandfather, a candle, a cactus plant, and a sewing machine. At the end of this narrated meeting field, the Jews were empathic, struggling to ask for forgiveness. This was the point at which the Jewish participants became interested in their own identity both as Jews and as Israelis.

Dialogue on Common Ground

As facilitators, we aimed to assist both subgroups to swap their polarities so that Self and Other could become one, or at least find common ground. We encouraged the Israelis to connect to the components of their national identity, while the Arabs were supported to connect to each individual identity. We believed that to reach a dialogic relationship, the two subgroups had to travel through the experiences of each participant in order to visit the other's polarity, the less visited one. Awareness of the whole spectrum would allow for a fuller, more complete self definition, which, in turn, would enable a meeting on common ground -- a dialogue.

These polar starting positions between the Arabs and the Jews can be understood through a sociological lens focused on a major difference between a Western sensibility and an Eastern one. The Western orientation (which includes Ashkenazi Jews) encourages the individual to demand personal freedom and a personal identity, while the Eastern one (which includes Arabs,

Sephardic Jews, and religious Ashkenazi Jews) is still heavily encoded on the collective, tribal way of existing in the world.

The workshop attempt at a common dialogue started with a negotiation, when the participants turned to the facilitators, inquiring, *what shall we talk about?* The group as a whole struggled through *how shall we talk?* as a way of resisting responding themselves to their own first question. Then, finally, they arrived where they had begun: *What shall we talk about?*

An essential part of the negotiation was whether to address the personal or the national in relation to the Jewish/Israeli – Arab/Palestinian conflict and its history. At this stage the struggle was settled by the facilitators, because we pushed at this stage towards a national dialogue between the two subgroups, trusting that it would enable a more open and authentic interpersonal one on their psychological differences.

Facing One Another's Polarity

"If this is what you want," the Jews threw at the group and the facilitators, "this is what you'll get!" They then put openly on the table the terrorist actions, the violence, and the suicide bombers.

The group, finally, had arrived at the phenomenology of two camps facing one another. The Jews accepted the direction they were being drawn toward, and looked squarely at the history of injustice felt by the Arabs. The militant leader of the Arab subgroup, who was waiting for this opportunity to present oneself, railed on about the military occupation, the blocked villages, and the road blockades.

At the height of the argument, one of the Arabs pulled a rabbit out of his hat: "You – you had Holocaust done to you, and now you are doing a Holocaust to us!" This was a common, repeated argument in every group we have run, always evoked by the Holocaust Memorial Day in Israel. This common retort entails the thrust of a jest about the national conflict. It provokes rage in Jews staggered by this jest, who perceive this comparison as unacceptable.

This process repeats itself in every group. Finally, some one member of each subgroup will lead the group into a conversation. At the end of this painful, heated, rough meeting, the Jewish group turns into a nationalistic group with a sense of unity – the common denominator being Judaism, external threat, feelings of terror, hopelessness, and then the hope of finding rest as Jews in a country safe to them. The Arabs move in the other direction. Their group, which starts out as united and nationalistic, comes to understand that entrenched difference is not always the right way.

As a result of the strengthening of the Jews who are now closer to one another because of the retort of the Arabs, the Arabs now experience a sense that their original stance will only evoke violence. The Arabs start to feel some guilt. No one denies at some point during a dialogue that it is fascinating to witness the experience of what happens when they take upon themselves each other's stance/polarity.

At this stage the participants who stressed their Jewish and Israeli identity get more power and space. They now feel freed-up and more committed to presenting on stage short pieces that express who they are where they are.

The Arabs/Palestinians lose some of the empathy and the compromise offered earlier by the Jews, their sense of being right now somewhat shaken. Pacified voices that were earlier muted are now coming alive. The militant expression among them and those who hang on to it are now left aside. A space for left wing, liberal leaders from both subgroups opens up. For the first time there is a dialogue in the room about compromise.

The danger, at this stage, is that the Israeli group will continue to move in the direction of rightwing nationality and become stronger as a group to a degree in which it will close down to the option of a dialogic relationship with the Palestinians. The danger on the Arab side is that they will give up totally on their inner-group alliance and surrender to the Jews, in attempt to be 'good and exemplary Arabs' and keep away from trouble.

In spite of the negative experience they went through, their test here is to be able to continue to hold on to their individual, group, and sub-group rights and to talk about their pain, while being able also to hold the personhood of the other in view and to give space to their difference. The demands on the Jewish side is that even though they are compared to the Nazis at this moment, and hear explanations of the Muslim Shahids (the suicide bombers), they will remain open to a dialogue between their and the Arabs' identities.

Conclusion

In a country where real buses often explode and don't arrive to their peaceful destination, the ultimate test for our journeying, conflictual sub-groups is whether they can avoid expected violent outcomes and collaborate to create a show to be presented to an audience.

The show is the last stop of the group's journey. At the last stop, we examine who stayed -- How many Arabs? How many Jews? -- and, Who left? Did the Jews and Arabs get off the bus of their newly emerging psychology from the same door and go together onto the stage?

At the end of each show, there is a dialogue between the audience and the actors. As during the process of group work, the audience's reactions vary.

Some condemn the group as a whole by highlighting the Palestinian narrative. All in all, however, we end up with an authentic show. The actors have had a chance to share their intimacy with the audience. Hence, they have become ambassadors of their belief in the bridging of difference through dialogue.

In our experience, the unique contribution of the mix between theatre performance and group facilitation allows introspection and the development of the awareness and insight of the question of "Why do I act like I act?" Performance and facilitation also function as a tool for deep personal and group work, including personal and group expression, release and empowerment -- all forming a gestalt in group and certainly during the time spent standing on stage in front of an audience. Furthermore, we think that the mix and the integration between the interior monologue and the exterior dialogue, along with the examination and acknowledgement of the internal parts and the external expression, create a more whole and complete experience that establishes change and strengthens it.

The schools of psychology in general, and the dynamic and psychoanalytic ones in particular, send the person inward into the labyrinth of his or her soul and try to assist the client in cracking the neurotic code of actions and experiences. We think that this is a complicated task (some would say impossible) and unnatural. Through theatre and role play, however, we return to the natural and basic means of human expression in which a person puts on a variety of masks and plays and acts out self. The personal and group expression through sound, movement, and imagery expands one's ability to observe and allows one to bypass the walls of defense, objection, and deflection. Likewise, it allows the expression of areas that are unconscious and not readily available, all the while working through them in the group constellation. The option open to the members both to act and to watch their friends act, enables the experience of catharsis.

Personal Account

During the years we worked together as an Arab and a Jew, and as co-facilitators of cross-cultural groups it was clear to us that we developed a specific model of working as we moved along. In coming to write this chapter we had to articulate our model in words, an undertaking that enabled us to observe our mutual disagreements and understandings of our model and work accordingly.

Co-writing was a journey in which we rediscovered the milestones we passed through in the years, and the picture of our journey suddenly became clearer and at the same time more complex. We had to re-ask ourselves the question of whether the groups we established contributed to effectively counseling cross-cultural groups and also address the inherent conflict they were created to bridge, i.e., the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, or whether they just intensify it. We realized that although we have assumed particular stations during our journey, each participant also interacted amongst both of our unique styles during the different phases of the counseling process. During the writing of this chapter, we re-lived the difficulties of establishing and guiding such a complex group. The process enabled us to refine very special and endearing moments, and revisit interesting people that touched us in a special way during our journey.

At first we were enthusiastic about the inter-personal interactions and its unlimited potential, which gave birth to a unique creation, along with the ability to achieve a mutual goal, i.e., bridging our two seemingly separate worlds. We revealed to each other some of the most intimate parts of our being, without knowing where this writing process would lead us to, and we also questioned whether we should focus on ourselves or on the group. Eventually we were both hurt and overwhelmed by intimidating feelings, resulting from an overpowering love-hate relationship, attraction and outright repulsion. This level of exposure and intimacy led each of us to close down before the other.

From that point, the focus of the subject matter shifted from us to the group, and we seldom sat down to write together. Thus, we felt protected from the process of writing and the feelings evoked in each of us as well as between us.

At the end of this co-writing process, we felt the beginning of a sobering maturation, alongside the naivety we shared at the start of writing this essay. Today we face the challenge of continuation. Where do we continue from here? Will our working relationship endure and improve? How can we evolve together from this seemingly interpersonal stalemate? Despite our growing and sobering up of our phenomenological fields coupled with the narrowing of the passion in our souls, we both feel very connected to this "baby" and will continue to cultivate this project, even though our external environment surrounding both of us is so frustrating.

*Sa'ed Tali, Lod, Israel
Oshrat Mizrahi Shapira, Ra'anana, Israel*

References

- Allport G. W. (1954). *The Nature of Prejudice*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.
- Back, K.W. (1972). *Beyond Words*, Baltimore: Penguin Books.
- Benne, K.D., Bradford, L.D., Gibb, J.R, and Lippitt R.O. (Eds.) (1975). *The Laboratory Method of Changing and Learning*, Palo Alto: Science and Behavior Books.
- Boal, Augusto (1981). *Poetics of the Oppressed, Theater of the Oppressed*, Theater Communications Group. New York, 1985.
- Buber, M., (1981) *Besod Sia'ch Jerusalem*: Mossad Bialik.
- Burton, J.W. (1969). *Conflict and Communication: The Use of Controlled Communication in International Relations*, London: MacMillan.
- Cahanov, Maya and Katz, Israel (1980). A Survey of Dilemmas in Guidance of Dialog Groups Between Jews and Arabs in Israel, *Megamot*, 29-47.
- Kecman, J.E. (1979). An international approach to conflict resolution and its application to Israeli-Palestinian relations, *International Interactions*, Vol. 6, No. 2, 99-122.
- Kelman, H. C. (1979). An interactional approach to conflict resolution and its application to Israeli-Palestinian relations. *International Interactions*, 6 (2), 99-122.
- Lev-Algem, Shulamit and First, Anat (2000). The circle of fringe: from community theater to mass communications, *Keshet*, 28, 82-94.
- Pettigrew, T. F. (1998). Intergroup contact theory. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 49, 65-85. New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press.
- Steinberg, S. (2002). *Typology for Discourse Classification in Conflict Groups, in Group Dynamics in a Multi-Cultural Society*. Lea Cassan, Rachel Bar-Ziv eds., *Cherikover, Tel-Aviv*, 65-74.
- Triandis, H.C. (1983). *Essentials of Studying Cultures, Handbook of Inter-Cultural Training*, D. Landis and R. Brislin (Eds.), New York: Elmsford.