BRIDGING THE IMPOSSIBLE? CONFRONTING BARRIERS TO DIALOGUE BETWEEN ISRAELIS AND GERMANS AND ISRAELIS AND PALESTINIANS

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Abstract

This article explores difficulties with dialogue that exist between Jewish-Israelis, and Germans and Palestinians. A presentation of dialogue in conflict resolution and Buber's conceptualization of dialogue is followed by a discussion of 6 obstacles that hamper communication: a collective identity rooted in victimhood; difficulty in being empathetic to the suffering of the Palestinian and German others; high emotions and over-use of defense mechanisms; blame and scapegoating; family patterns; and group-think. Woven within these concepts are examples drawn from the contexts of the long-term effects of the Holocaust on survivors and their descendants, and the Palestinian – Israeli conflict. The article ends with techniques for the creation of safe places that can help open up dialogue and break down barriers between groups in conflict.

Introduction

…I found myself sitting engulfed in an endless cloud of cigarette smoke, wedged between five Palestinian women. Thoughts were going through my head: I have never been among people who smoke so much! Doesn't the smell bother them? How long am I going to be able to take this? I was seated between two young women, who had to talk over me in order to converse with one another. Every now and then I noticed that the women gave each other sideways glances, and although I did not understand Arabic, I assumed that they were making occasional comments: Who is this middle-aged white woman who's sitting here?... What is she doing here? Why doesn't she get up and move? Perhaps because I can be obstinate, perhaps because I wanted to connect with these Palestinian women, and/or perhaps because I saw retreat as failure on my part, I decided to continue to sit there…deciding that I wouldn't get up and move even if none of those women stopped speaking Arabic for a moment and turned to me to find out who I was…

It was…spring 2000 and we were having dinner at a small restaurant in Jerusalem. It was the evening before I was to co–facilitate a seminar with two

Palestinian colleagues… organized by the Van Leer Institute [for] women from South Africa, Northern Ireland, Croatia and Palestine and Israel [who had been invited] to share their experiences of living through wars, and coping with the traumas they had faced as they also worked on reconciliation with their "enemies." All of the participants were invited to this "get acquainted" dinner, before the seminar began. While I could have sat down in a "safer" spot, by the Israeli women… I chose to sit …near the Palestinian participants, thinking that it would be good to make contact with them as soon as possible. Thinking that I would demonstrate to them that I, a Jewish Israeli woman, was interested in getting to know them.

A number of thoughts ran through my head: WHAT are you doing here? They obviously don't want to include you in their conversation, and it's clear that they think it's quite strange that you continue to sit there, perhaps even somewhat impolite, as they have to talk above and around you to continue their discussion. Get up, move! No, I'll stay. I'll pretend that I am an anthropologist researching a people that I do not know well.

… I did not get up and move. I insisted on exposing myself to massive amounts of second–hand smoke and incomprehensible conversation. I insisted on feeling what it was like to be an outsider in a place where I should have felt at home– a…restaurant in west Jerusalem–the capital of MY country. It was only when …one of the Palestinian women finally turned to me in English and asked my name and who I was that I felt that some progress had been made, and that my obstinacy, or tenacity, had paid off. Choloud asked me who I was, what I did, and when we discovered that we shared a common background in sociology, we had quite a nice conversation. One or two of the other women also joined in a bit, but seemed to quickly lose interest in me. It was only Choloud who kept me from being a social disaster that evening, and who did her best to engage me in some conversation… (Chaitin, 2007, pp. xi – xii)

Did true dialogue take place during that spring evening in Jerusalem? Or during the seminar that followed?

The trauma of the Holocaust past and the Palestinian-Israeli unrelenting conflict make dialogue between Jewish-Israelis and Germans and between Jewish-Israelis and Palestinians extremely difficult, sometimes nearly impossible. For example, Jewish Israelis and Palestinians struggle to turn to one another in reflective communication due to: language barriers (Israelis speak Hebrew, Palestinians speak Arabic and few know the other's language); 'invisibility' – not really seeing the other and not really being seen by the other; and issues of belonging and fear, alienation and estrangement.

Given the enormity of the personal and collective traumas connected to the Holocaust past and to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, it is fair to ask: is it possible to bridge 'the impossible'? Is there a chance for true dialogue to occur between Jewish-Israelis and Germans and between Jewish-Israelis and Palestinians?

This question has no simple answers given that the effects of these traumas are especially insidious, and also intertwined with one another. Even though the Holocaust ended over 60 years ago, it continues to impact descendants of survivors (e.g. Danieli, 1998) in their relations with Germans (e.g. Bar-On, 1995; Bar-On, Ostrovsky & Fromer, 1998), and to also impact the present-day conflict between Jewish-Israelis and Palestinians (Adwan & Bar-On, 2001), since it is perceived as one of the main factors that brought about the establishment of the Jewish state (Bickerton & Klausner, 2004). In the case of the Israeli-Palestinian context, the violence continually creates new victims and new enemies. For many Jewish-Israelis and Palestinians, the seemingly unbreakable circle of past and present fear and pain penetrates daily life – leaving little room for reflection, or for moving beyond the wounds to more complex understandings of self and others.

In this article, I briefly explore some psycho-social issues that create difficulties for Jewish-Israelis to explore and embrace opportunities for reflective and open dialogue with their past and present 'enemies'. These issues include: (1) A collective identity rooted in victimhood; (2) Difficulty in being empathetic to others' pains – especially those perceived to be 'the enemy'; (3) Intense emotions and over-use of defense mechanisms; (4) Blame and scapegoating; (5) Family patterns; and (6) Group-think, and its related de-individualized and stereotypical perceptions of the other.

Before exploring these obstacles, however, it is important to note that aside from the psychological aspects that often make constructive communication illusive, there are also social, cultural and political realities that make dialogue so hard. In the Jewish Israeli-German case, it is important to understand that in Israel the Holocaust is a part of everyday life; a day does not go by that the Holocaust is not mentioned in the media. In addition, it is a required subject in high schools. Each year between 14,000-20,000 11th and 12th graders take a Holocaust-trip to Poland, visiting the former death camps and ghettos, bringing history into their lives (Ministry of Education, 2002). Therefore, the Holocaust is continually re-inscribed in younger generations. Furthermore, given that one major message of these trips is that Israel needs to remain militarily strong, so that it can defend itself (Feldman, 2008), the Holocaust is directly tied to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

In the Israeli/Palestinian case, sustaining dialogue is extremely difficult given that the violent conflict between the sides continually claims victims. Currently, Israel occupies the West Bank and controls movement of Palestinians from the Gaza Strip. The Palestinian government is divided; Fatah controls the West Bank and Hamas the Gaza Strip. The Israeli military controls movement of Palestinians in the West Bank as well, and Palestinians are often not allowed to enter into Israel, and can only do so legally with difficult-to-obtain permits ("Ground to a Halt: Denial of Palestinians' Freedom of Movement in the West Bank", 2007). When Israelis enter the West Bank to meet Palestinians, they are often doing so illegally – as these areas are defined as closed military zones (Hamoked, Center for the Defence of the Individual, 2007). As a result,

Palestinians and Israelis have few opportunities to talk with one another, as seekers of a joint peace. All this means that even though small groups or individuals may desire to meet to try to further peace on the ground, the realities of the 'outside' *always* intrude, and often threaten to shut down dialogue, at least for awhile.

After looking at the psycho-social difficulties noted above, I will present some ways in which individuals and groups can work toward breaking this seemingly unbreakable chain of fear and despair by working on joint dialogue through the sharing of personal stories and experiences connected to the traumas and through the creation of 'safe spaces' for communication that include self-and joint reflection not only on the inter-personal level, but more importantly on the inter-group level. Such work, when rooted in commitment to the process of dialogue and connection, and in values of social justice and non-violence, can help break down the impossibility of the dialogues. It can also lead to the creation of more complex perspectives of the self and other(s), necessary for an envisioned future of co-existence and acceptance.

Before beginning this task, however, it is important to introduce a conceptual discussion about dialogue and its role in conflict resolution and reconciliation. Bohm, Factor and Garret's (1991) thoughts provide a good starting point:

> Dialogue… is a way of exploring the roots of the many crises that face humanity…It enables inquiry into, and understanding of… processes that fragment and interfere with real communication between individuals, nations and even different parts of the same organization… men and women are able to interact with one another in many ways: they can sing dance or play together with little difficulty but their ability to talk together about subjects that matter deeply to them seems invariable to lead to dispute, division and often to violence...In Dialogue… people can explore the individual and collective presuppositions, ideas, beliefs, and feelings that subtly control their interactions. It provides an opportunity to participate in a process that displays communication successes and failures. It can reveal the often puzzling patterns of incoherence that lead the group to avoid certain issues or… to insist, against all reason, on standing and defending opinions about particular issues. Dialogue is a way of observing, collectively, how hidden values and intentions can control our behavior, and how unnoticed cultural differences can clash without our realizing what is occurring. It [is] … an arena in which collective learning takes place and out of which a sense of increased harmony, fellowship and creativity can arise… (Bohm, Factor and Garret, 1991, paragraphs 1-3)

When parties in conflict agree to enter into dialogue, they are not only initiating a conversation, but crossing a threshold into a new relationship with one another. This is because dialogue provides participants with opportunities to say and hear statements they never said or heard before, and this has real potential for changing them forever (Maiese, 2003). This conceptualization of dialogue has as one of its assumptions that parties interested in dialogue, approach the process with true desire to listen, learn, and perhaps,

to develop new shared understandings (Turner, 1986) concerning the conflict and their roles in it.

When dialogue is used in peace-building and reconciliation processes, it provides a good framework for the open and direct flow of information, a necessary step toward gaining insights into how the other perceives the world, and the divide. Therefore, as the Public Conversation Project (2003) so carefully reminds us, the foremost goal of inter-group dialogue is *not* the achievement of solutions to the conflict, but rather the increase in understanding. In addition, as Krauss and Morsella (2006, p.153) note, dialogical communication is not the property of one side, but is: "…regarded as a joint accomplishment of the participants, who have collaborated to achieve some set of communicative goals. Meaning is "socially situated." Since parties enter into dialogue out of a true concern not only for oneself or one's group, but also for the 'adversary' (Pruitt & Kim, 2004), dialogue partners make a conscious choice to focus on positively strengthening their relationship, as opposed to winning the battle.

Dialogue between conflict parties can unfold in many ways, some of which may be expected from the beginning, and others that are often unknown and unpredictable. This is because dialogue is a dynamic process, and as participants attempt to understand how the other perceives the world, in the process, the partners are also compelled to reflect on their own worldviews and understandings. This is not always easy as it may lead to learning uncomfortable/unpleasant things about one's own attitudes and behaviors (Chaitin, 2007). Therefore, while dialogue between parties in conflict has great potential for growth and connection, its ability to make one vulnerable and undermine one's previous secure beliefs, makes it also a risky enterprise (Stewart & D'Angelo, 1980).

The above conceptualization provides the context for a discussion of my perspective of the concept of "dialogue," rooted firmly in the works of Martin Buber.

When Buber wrote in 1958 that: "All real living is meeting" (Buber 1958, p. 25), he meant that it is only through relation that we can fully open ourselves to others, thus reflecting his focus on relationship and the dialogical nature of existence. As Smith (2000) notes, Buber's best known concept is that of the "I-You", which involves being part of a whole, being part of another. The "I" is possible only through relation to the "Thou." This qualitatively differs from I-It, a pseudo-relation that distances people, and that emphasizes differences and separation between the "I" and other. Buber explored ways in which people could engage with each other fully, in order to ultimately meet with themselves. Therefore, according to Buber, human existence cannot be found in the individual or the collective, but in 'Man with Man' (Buber, 1947).

As Hodes (1972, p. 72), a Buberian scholar states: When one tries to communicate with another, something takes place which is not found elsewhere … "the sphere of the between". It is only when we learn to live in relation to others, through dialogue, that we recognize the possibilities that are present in that space between us.

Buber sees participants in genuine dialogue as looking to form a living mutual relation. However, genuine dialogue is very rare, differing dramatically from *technical*

dialogue, a dialogue, though rooted in the need to understand, does not engage the soul. Technical dialogue also differs from *monologue* – also unfortunately very common – which is speaking disguised as dialogue. When a person is in monologue, s/he is actually only speaking with him or herself, and remains separated from the other, while falsely believing that they are engaged in a true interpersonal relation (Buber 1947, p. 19; Smith, 2000).

Buber's later works also explored "silence" – a flow of peace and trust that preludes speech. Though it may appear paradoxical and counter-intuitive, silence plays a crucial part in dialogue (Nakane, 2007), and may even be the basis of dialogue (Avnon 1998, pp. 42-43). Silence is an active state, for in silence, the person is often considering what s/he wants to say, or refrains from verbally expressing. The result is a tiny spark of what Lacourt (1970) has called the Inner Light. For the light to grow, the person must silence inner arguments and emotions, and become fully attentive to both self and other. When discussing this Inner Light, Lacourt (1970) has noted that speech without attentive minds and silent hearts is meaningless. True dialogue, in the Buberian sense, in which an I-You relation exists, involves both silence and speech (Smith, 2000).

As can be expected, dialogical relations between people are dynamic; individuals move back and forth between I-It and I-You relations. However, dialogue is more than interpersonal relational building; indeed the quality of life of an entire community depends on the extent to which I-You relations exist. The combination of open inter-subjective dialogue allows a common discourse to develop and crystallize – noted by Buber as essential for holding a society together.

Buber's work on dialogue did not take place in a vacuum. After immigrating to Palestine in 1938 to escape Nazi persecution, he worked for Jewish-Arab cooperation and for the establishment of a bi-national state in Palestine (Schmidt, n.d.). After his vision did not come to pass, and the Jewish state of Israel was established in 1948, Buber continued to work for Jewish-Arab understanding and to reopen dialogue with German thinkers and institutions (Smith, 2000). Given Buber's understandings of dialogue and encounter, and his connections to Jewish-Arab and Jewish-German relations, I find his perspectives to be especially relevant for discussions of dialogue in the contexts discussed in this article. Therefore, I will now humbly follow in his path as I turn to obstacles that make genuine dialogue so difficult.

Obstacles to Exploring and Embracing Opportunities for Dialogue

One of the greatest obstacles to breaking the chain of fear, hatred and despair is a personal and collective identity rooted in victimhood. Adwan and Bar-On (2001, p.vii), co-directors of the joint Palestinian-Israeli research NGO PRIME, state as: "Victimhood … is an identity process or…state of mind that is developed in violent and long conflicts, in which at least one party (sometimes both) reconstructs its identity around its

victimization by the other side. Victimhood describes and defines the situation of conflict the parties live in." In such an instance, the person finds it very difficult to see beyond his/her own suffering to embrace a more complex identity, and to reach out to others in a reflective, open dialogue that could challenge the victimhood identity. This conceptualization also meshes with Kelman's (1999) understandings: when an individual's or group's collective identity is wrapped up tightly with victimhood, there is a negative interdependence with one's enemy. That is, one's sense and definition of self is co-dependent on the identification of an external enemy who is perceived as the concretization of evil.

In order to get a sense of what this negative co-dependence and victimhood look like, here are some words spoken by Yonit, a 40 year old Jewish Israeli woman who has lived in the United States for 25 years, in an interview that she gave for a study that I am jointly undertaking with a Palestinian colleague, Dr. Elia Awwad, on sense of self and sense of other among Palestinian and Israeli immigrants to the US (Interview, Fort Lauderdale, March, 2006). Two of my questions focused on "How do you see the Palestinian other?" and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

> …Wow. That is a hard question. I really saw them [Palestinian acquaintances] as family and as good members and as part of us because they grew up with us at home and I was at their village in my childhood. And I thought of us as cousins and that we could really live in peace. Today with all of the 'Shahidim' [translation - martyrs] and the suicide bombers and after all of the disasters that they brought on the country…there are a few families that I know where they lost someone who they know or a family member that was killed on one of the busses or was hurt…when I talk with my cousin [who lives in Israel] and he says that by mistake he entered a town where Arabs live, he turns on the radio full volume… and he … puts on the radio full volume and he puts his arm on the window so that he will look like one of them and so they won't do something bad to him and when he gets out of there he says a prayer because he feels that his life was saved…. Today I look at them only like enemies and it hurts, now it's far from seeing them as cousins or friends or families, we see them only as terrible enemies and you need to be afraid and be careful and I want to say to hate them, I hate that word, but they cause it. The conflict? I wish it would finish, but I don't think it will. We give them a finger and they want the whole hand. I wish that I could believe that Ariel Sharon said we will give this to them and there will be peace and we will give them that and there will be peace but I think it's the opposite now they see that with the suicide bombing they got what they wanted and so a few more suicide bombing and in the end the country will be theirs. I don't want to believe that this will happen. Most of the world is with us and won't let it happen, but since they think this way, I don't think that there will be peace soon.

Yonit's perception of the Palestinians is one-dimensional and based in her self/group perception that Israelis are the victims – victims of Palestinian hatred and greed, victims who once believed that peace was possible but now can only see the harm and pain caused by the Palestinians to her people. In her speech, Palestinians are termed *Shahidim* (martyrs) and terrorists, as people who cause disasters. She feels that she, her family, and Israelis, in general, are dependent – at least partially – on the ill-will of the Palestinian other. Although her personal childhood experiences with Palestinian acquaintances were warm, and although she has lived in the United States for most of her life, she remains wrapped in victimhood, drawn to collective hate and a despair that things will most likely not change for the better.

A second obstacle to open and connecting dialogue is the loss of empathy for the suffering of others. Empathy is the ability to see reality from another's point of view and to understand his/her thoughts and feelings in a given situation (Batson et al., 1989). Empathy is expressed through non-judgmental responses that reflect understanding and acceptance of the emotions behind the words (Rogers, 1959), even when the empathetic individual disagrees with the other's point of view and ideas.

Social-psychologists have found how important it is to enhance empathy in groups in conflict since this ability can contribute to elimination of negative stereotypes and to decreasing feelings of fear and threat (Rothman, 1992; Stephan & Finley, 1999). In their work with Israelis and Palestinians, Nadler and Shnabel (2006) found that in inter-group meetings, expressions of empathy by Palestinians, who saw themselves as victims, concerning the plight of the Israelis, who were perceived by the Palestinians to be the perpetrators in the conflict, led Israeli participants to be more open for reconciliation. Once the Palestinian victims expressed empathy with the Israelis' pains, the Israelis understood that the Palestinians accepted them as human beings who too suffer from the conflict. Such expressions of empathy 're-humanized' the Israelis, who felt that they were seen as individuals who had committed bad acts, rather than as bad and immoral people.

High emotions and the over-use of ego defense mechanisms create a third obstacle for Jewish-Israelis to engage in open, honest dialogue with German and Palestinian others. Bar-On (2007) and Lindner (2002, 2006) have found that victims of humiliation and violence will often displace the anger they feel toward their aggressor on others. Displacement, a psychological defense mechanism used to distort one's image of reality in order to ward off anxiety, involves anger and aggression. It protects the individual from expressing risky hostility toward others, especially when they are embroiled in a dangerous situation (Freud, 1967; McWilliams, 2003).

Danger situations experienced in early childhood can be further elicited by similar perceived threat during later stages of development. Therefore, child survivors of the Holocaust, and/or children whose childhood has been characterized by war, such as Jewish-Israelis and Palestinians who have grown up against the backdrop of the constant conflict, can easily perceive similar pervasive threats in adulthood – oftentimes unconnected to whether or not an objective threat exists. This means that child victims of

these two extreme conflicts may continue to see threat everywhere and all of the time – having difficulty discerning peaceful periods or opportunities that present themselves for dialogue and reaching out to one another.

Although defense mechanisms often work to protect the individual against intense feelings of anxiety, they involve self-deception and may seriously interfere with the effective resolution of the actual problem. The inability to face one's aggressor, either because technically it is impossible to do so – as in the case of survivors of the Holocaust or their descendants and their Nazi persecutors – or because one feels too weak to do so, can lead former victims to become violent toward weaker targets. Displacement of anger and aggression has also been tied to the construction of identity that has victimhood as a central component, an aspect I noted above (Adwan & Bar-On, 2001).

People who have been harmed tremendously by others often use additional ego defenses such as projection and rationalization when relating to their 'enemies.' They tend to displace their aggression from their perpetrators to all others who are designated as being an 'other,' often regardless of whether or not this other ever caused them pain. When victims project their own feelings of aggression and hatred onto their enemies, it makes it easier for them to rationalize that their lack of empathy (or worse) is justified, due to the harm the victims have suffered in the past. Therefore, such massive use of defense mechanisms makes it very difficult, if not impossible, for victims of extreme social trauma to understand the other's reality and to be empathetic toward others who suffer (Batson et al., 1989; Rogers, 1959).

An interview undertaken with Yona, a Holocaust survivor, exemplified this absence of empathy. I interviewed Yona for a Palestinian-Israeli oral history project from PRIME. The participants in the study came from two groups: Palestinians who were still refugees of the 1948 war and Israelis, who had been refugees from the Holocaust, and had settled in Israel and became citizens. We documented the experiences of these individuals, and analyzed how their experiences impacted the way they saw the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and possible solutions to this ongoing war.

Yona was a teenager from Hungary who survived Auschwitz. His story focused on his and his family's experiences, and he went into detail concerning the dissolution of his 'normal' life after the Nazis invaded Budapest in 1944 and the violence that he and his loved ones suffered. After Yona told his life story, he was asked to share his views on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, including possible solutions to this conflict and to the Palestinian refugee issue. Yona said:

> …If it were up to me I would put all of the Palestinians on transports and send
> them to the gas chambers just like they (the Nazis) did with us. And I know
> Palestinians, I have worked with them and I have had Palestinian friends, but this
> is what I think… (Interview, Israel, March, 2003).

His statement was so emotionally difficult for me to absorb that I actually did not 'hear' it until I watched the video of the interview to check for sound and visual quality.

However, once the message was heard, it left no room for confusion; one of the main lessons of the Holocaust for Yona was that when one carries out violence against your group, the only solution is to answer them in kind. I find it interesting that while he repeatedly talked about the cruelty of the Nazis and their Hungarian collaborators toward the Jews, Yona does not say that these perpetrators should have been gassed after the war ended. This macabre suggestion is made only for the Palestinians, his present day enemies. And, indeed, when I asked Yona if he would be interested in participating in encounter group meetings with Palestinians who were being interviewed for the study, he gave me a resounding "**No**! There was no point, he had no interest, what for…?"

Among Holocaust survivors and victims of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, an additional obstacle to dialogue is tied to recurring family patterns. All families have discernible patterns, forms, values, norms and roles (Handel, 1985; Kingsbury & Scanzoni, 1993). Some characteristic family patterns include: (a) family myths – well-integrated beliefs, shared by family members, concerning each other and their mutual position in the family. These myths tend to go unchallenged, in spite of the reality distortions which they may conspicuously imply. Family myths help preserve stability, especially in the time of crisis (Muncie, Wetherell, Dallos & Cochrane, 1995); (b) family rituals – symbolic behavior that develops and is repeated in families because of the meaning and satisfaction that participants get out of it (Berg-Cross, 2000) and (c) family themes – central issues around which individuals define the unique boundaries of their family (Handel, 1985).

In the Jewish-Israeli case, myths and themes often revolve around issues connected to the Holocaust and to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Family rituals for these myths and themes will include repeated stories of extreme persecution and/or heroism, with conspicuous reminders of past loss, such as photo albums, videos, yearly memorials etc. (Witztum, Malkinson & Rubin, 2001). Therefore, speech is often focused on the loss, the suffering, the victimhood.

Given that family boundaries with the external world are permeable and context-dependent, it can be hypothesized that in situations of extreme psychic fear – brought on by memories of the Holocaust and memories and present-day events connected to Palestinian-Israeli conflict – family myths, rituals and themes centered on suffering, victimhood and fear of one's 'enemy' may become even more pronounced and re-inscribed in different generations. If we tie these myths, rituals and themes to a strong Jewish-Israeli ideology that couples militarism and sacrifice with patriotism, as in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict (Auron, 1993; Witztum, Malkinson & Rubin, 2001), we can see how such family patterns can reinforce the perception that the war between the two groups is 'natural', 'inevitable' and even 'heroic.' In such a case, dialogue may appear out of the question.

Blame/scapegoating are additional obstacles to dialogue in the Holocaust and in the Palestinian-Israeli contexts. Blame and scapegoating are two sides of the same coin; while blame can be turned inward, as in the case of Holocaust survivors who often ask

themselves why they survived when others did not (Lifton, 1980; Niederland, 1968), it can also be turned outward, to an external scapegoat.

Scapegoats are people who are blamed for the faults or problems of others (Brahm, 2004). When individuals/groups search for scapegoats, they also use defense mechanisms in that the search and labeling connects to denial and to the projection of responsibility/blame on others. As Brahm (2004) has noted, scapegoating has two 'positive' effects for a perpetrator: it works toward elimination of negative feelings about the self and it also provides a sense of gratification in being able to pinpoint the 'guilty.' This, in turn, can help the individual justify aggression toward the scapegoat and also to draw a strict and rigid separation between 'good' and 'bad.' Once such a judgment is made, it becomes increasingly easier to see oneself as blameless and to decide that the other is indeed responsible for the pain, therefore, deserving of punishment.

In inter-group conflict, scapegoating is part of a process that has specific psychological, social and political contexts that result in an "us vs. them" dichotomy (Brahm, 2004; Waller, 2002). It is fair to assert that in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, the majority of Jewish Israelis feel that most of the blame for the unending violence is due to the Palestinians' 'evil' behaviors and beliefs, and that it is only the Israelis who yearn for peace and make true efforts in that direction (Bar-On, Yitzhaki-Verner & Amir, 1996).

Connected to scapegoating are the phenomena of deindivdualization and stereotypical perceptions that individuals and groups in conflict hold of one another (Staub, 2003; Waller, 2002). These cognitive misperceptions and generalizations are also often reinforced by group-think (Janis, 1982) which occurs when a group makes faulty decisions because group pressures lead members to fail to think clearly about different possibilities, to develop a very biased view of 'reality' and to forgo moral judgment, to at least some extent. Groups affected by groupthink tend to ignore alternative ways of viewing the problem or the other, because in part, they deindividuate and dehumanize these others – especially if they are categorized as belonging to 'the enemy.'

Janis (1982) noted 8 symptoms of groupthink. The following five appear to be especially relevant for Jewish-Israel relationships with German past enemies, and with the Palestinians, their present-day ones: (1) Belief in inherent morality – group members become convinced of the rightness of their cause and so they ignore the ethical consequences of their decisions. For example, due to the harm done to the Jewish people during the Holocaust, many Jewish-Israelis feel that their morality cannot be questioned and so they often disregard Israeli harm done to Palestinians and/or do not reflect on the consequences of military and Jewish settler actions in the Occupied Territories (Chaitin & Steinberg, 2008); (2) Members hold stereotyped images of out-groups, making violent responses justified; (3) Direct pressure on dissenters – group members who hold different views than those of the mainstream are put under immense pressure not to express this dissention. This is true, for example, of groups such as the Israeli Gush Shalom – Shalom Bloc, which calls for and engages in joint actions and talks with Palestinians. This movement's actions and statements are, at best, often perceived by Jewish-Israelis to be

outside the realm of 'responsible' Israeli behavior, and at worst, to be acts of treason (4) Direct pressure on dissenters often leads to self-censor-ship – group members refrain from publicly expressing doubts concerning group consensus. In Danieli's (1998) terms, this "conspiracy of silence" reflects a manifest and/or latent message that only certain topics may be discussed, and these only in certain 'acceptable' ways (5) Self-appointed 'mindguards' – these are members who 'protect' the group from learning information that is problematic or contradictory to the group's cohesiveness, view and/or decisions. Israeli mainstream mass media often reinforces the hegemonic perception of Israeli 'goodness' and Palestinian 'evil' by either not reporting human rights abuses by Israeli soldiers and settlers, or by giving such events little exposure, by referring to peace activists as 'extremists' whose actions are outside the realm of normative Israeli behavior, and by using terminology for Palestinians that reinforce the perception that many Palestinians are 'terrorists' (Komem, 2001).

The following example demonstrates how deindividuation, stereotyping and groupthink created obstacles for reflective dialogue in a student exchange between Israeli and German students – children and grandchildren of Holocaust survivors and Nazi perpetrators and bystanders – that I facilitated with a German colleague from Hamburg, Dr. Isolde de Vries in 1997. The encounter was the last of four seminars between German and Israeli universities from the late 1980s. The exchange included two parts: first a visit by the German participants to Israel in the spring and a reciprocal visit by the Israeli participants to Germany in late summer. These seminars were very intense; each part ran for a week and a half, the students were hosted in one another's students' apartments and homes, and the program included the recounting of personal and family stories connected to the Holocaust, as well as trips to Holocaust-related sites, such as Yad Vashem in Israel and Neuengamme – a former slave camp – in Germany.

The entire exchange was characterized by high emotions and tension that were never fully resolved. In the Israeli group, which had 10 participants, there was a student, Yael, who was a granddaughter of a survivor. Yael defined herself as "extremely left wing," and was also perceived in this way by the Israeli and German students. Most of the members of the German group, which was comprised of 9 students – 8 women and one man – presented themselves as "radicals" who were active in left-wing political parties. During the trip to Israel they made a number of pro-Palestinian and anti-Israeli comments. Participants in the German group appeared to feel the most comfortable with Yael, letting her know that: 'You are one of us' – a stance that upset Yael.

During the first seminar, the relations between the two groups were polite; on the surface, the groups got along well and the Israelis were extremely attentive hosts. Yael did not outwardly show that she was unhappy being 'adopted' by the German group. However, when the Israeli group met after the German group had returned home, Yael said: "They are hypocrites and racists. The Germans act as if they're open, but they only accept those who think like them and hate anyone who's different…" (Interview, Israel,

March, 1997). Yael was not sure that she wanted to participate in the trip to Germany, but in the end, decided to go.

When in Germany, the Israeli students were very impressed with the seriousness with which the Germans related to recycling and the instructions that they were given by their student hosts concerning disposal of their garbage – brown glass was separated from green glass, plastic was separated from paper, and so on. Recycling became one of the central topics for the Israelis – first it was met with laughter, then with sarcasm, and in the end with anger. By the end of the seminar, this issue had become the turning point for the group and a symbol for the divide that separated the two groups.

In our guided tour of Neuengamme, we found all of the signs in the camp written only in German. This made the Germans uncomfortable and greatly distressed the Israeli group. At the end of the tour, when entering the exhibition hall, once again we found everything written only in German. By that time, the Israeli students had lost their patience and went outside to have their packed lunch.

As the Israeli group ate and talked, they talked about their experiences in the army. I found it fascinating that the group chose to have that discussion in that place, especially given that most of the group was comprised of women who had not served in combat units. It was clear that this group of descendants of Holocaust survivors, who were feeling quite overwhelmed by being in a former slave labor camp, needed to attain a sense of security by connecting to Israel's military strength in a place that symbolized the darkest period of victimization in Jewish history. As people got up to throw away their garbage, everyone noticed that on the trash containers the signs were written in German and English (e.g. "glass here," "paper here"). As perhaps could have been expected, this discovery led to a great deal of anger.

The next day, when the groups met for discussion, Yael exploded:

…You don't care about people, you only care about garbage! You say that you are in favor of minorities and the helpless and the wretched, but it's not true. You are busy sorting people into good and bad and you're busy sorting your smelly garbage. You don't care what happened to our families, you are willing to be our friends and spend time with us only on the condition that we hold the 'right' political views. I can't stand it anymore…" (Interview, Germany, August, 1997).

Yael, who in Buberian terms, was in monologue with herself, fled the room and refused to take part in any more of the joint dialogues.

This blow-up had a major impact on the relationships between the groups in that it influenced them to move toward a much deeper dialogue than before. During the last two days of the seminar, the relations between the two groups were far from 'polite'; the dialogue was painful, often accusatory, but also much more brave and honest. The students remained hypersensitive to one another, and there was no "happy end" to this exchange. However, by bringing the conflict out into the open, the participants were able to begin seeing one another as different individuals with unique experiences and

understandings, and by addressing issues of victims and victimizers, racism, stereotypes, ways of dealing with the past and conflictual family relations that had not been previously explored. Perhaps if there had been a follow-up seminar, some of these issues could have been further discussed. However, since this was the last time that the groups met, the students did not have further opportunity to enter into genuine dialogue.

In sum, then, we can see that there are at least 6 obstacles that make it difficult for the creation and sustaining of a true dialogue between Jewish-Israelis and Germans and between Jewish-Israelis and Palestinians.

When we look at possible meanings that the *overall combination* of these obstacles has for dialogue, we find that: (1) the obstacles combine psychological, family, social and cultural aspects. Therefore, when looking to overcome such barriers to dialogue between Jewish-Israelis and Palestinians and Germans, we should keep in mind that there are a myriad of aspects that need to be taken into consideration, from the most personal/ micro level to the most cultural/macro level. (2) The obstacles traverse time; not only do they pertain to the "here and now" dynamics occurring within the specific inter-group encounter, but also to the personal, family and collective histories of the participants. This means that dialogue, in the contexts discussed here, can be helpful for conflict resolution and reconciliation only when both time frames (and all that comes in between) are recognized and attended to. (3) The obstacles are further tied to the apparent need for Jewish-Israelis (though not only) to categorize themselves and their 'enemies' into victim and perpetrator roles. For example, when Jewish-Israelis and Germans enter into dialogue, it is often difficult since the Israelis (rightfully) assume the role of the victim and tend to (wrongly) perceive German young adults as perpetrators. This can explain the difficulty that Jewish-Israelis sometimes have in differentiating between the different German generations and in moving beyond these labels and rigid identities to more nuanced understandings and empathy. And in the case of Israeli-Palestinian dialogues, the Israelis are often at unease, for they see themselves as victims of terror attacks, still fighting for their country's existence, yet are often aware of the perpetrator roles that they (or others in their society) take in the Occupation of the West Bank and Gaza. This means that they are often torn between two roles, which have an (equal) pull. This feeling of cognitive dissonance can be quite unsettling, making true dialogue very difficult.

It is now time to ask the question: What are some ways for breaking down these difficulties and being in relation with the other?

Breaking the Chain of Fear, Hatred and Despair – the Role of Storytelling and Reflection

While the situation may seem bleak, those of us engaged in non-violence and human rights work believe that it is far from hopeless. One way to co-construct dialogue,

and the space between, is through reflective storytelling and reflection. Individuals, groups and grassroots organizations can offer opportunities of joint dialogue and self reflection that can help create more complex perspectives of the self and of the 'enemy.'

One promising way that facilitators can work in dialogue groups between Palestinians and Israelis, or between descendants of Holocaust survivors and descendants of Nazi perpetrators/bystanders, in order to help participants engage in deeper levels of understanding and cross-group dialogue is through storytelling (Albeck, Adwan & Bar-On, 2002; Bar-On & Kassem, 2004; Chaitin, 2004b; Steinberg & Bar-On, 2002) and through the creation of safe spaces for communication (Chaitin, 2004b). In encounter groups that use storytelling, group participants share their life stories, without interruption, within the context of the conflict being discussed, and then reflect together, as a group, on possible personal-social-cultural-political meanings that the story and experiences have. This reflection extends not only to the person who has shared experiences and understandings, but also to members of both groups who can begin to see 'reality' in more complex ways.

This is not an easy task. The use of storytelling requires facilitators and group members to become excellent and sensitive listeners, who refrain from judgmental comments and moralizing. Furthermore, this type of group facilitation and joint work requires time – it is a long-term process whose impacts are not easily attained or measurable (Chaitin, 2004a, 2004b).

Storytelling and personal narratives have been used since the 1990s in university settings and by civil society groups and organizations to reduce conflicts and work toward reconciliation between Jews and Germans, and between Jewish-Israelis and Palestinians and Germans. One example concerning the power of storytelling and reflective listening and dialogue comes from my experiences in the TRT – To Reflect and Trust – an organization that brought together people from different conflict areas in the world, with a major focus on the German – Jewish – Palestinian triangle (Bar-On, 2000).

The TRT began in 1992 as an encounter group between descendants of Nazi perpetrators and Jewish Holocaust survivors. The members, who were first invited by Bar-On to take part in the encounters, met together in a self-supporting atmosphere, to tell one another their life stories in order to better *work through* (that is, learn to live with) their pasts, as a result of their parents' experiences during WWII (Albeck, Adwan & Bar-On, 2002; Bar-On & Kassem, 2004). In 1998, the TRT invited former/present enemies from Northern Ireland, Palestine/Israel and South Africa to join their work. I joined the group in 2000, as part of the Israeli contingency.

For 15 years, the TRT met – usually once a year – each time in the country of one of the conflict groups, for a week long seminar. Group members were comprised of practitioners, educators, researchers, artists and community workers. The members from the conflict arenas were selected by original members of the TRT, who located people who were interested and/or working in topics connected to conflict resolution; therefore the group members cannot be viewed as being representative of the majority of the

societies from which they came. In these meetings we facilitated ourselves; we would sit together in small groups and tell one another our life histories, within the context of the conflict.

While telling one's story was the major aspect of the TRT meetings, empathically listening to the story of the "enemy" comprised the main, and extremely difficult, group work. We did our best to refrain from entering into political discussions, which have been shown to hinder dialogue, rather than encourage it (Steinberg & Bar-On, 2002). As Bar-On (2000) has noted, learning to contain the stories of the other, to hear their pain and to legitimize their narrative, while not negating our own pain and story, was the main work and "product" of the TRT process.

I remember one strong encounter. We were in Derry, Northern Ireland in 2002, meeting for the first time after the second Intifada had broken out. When it was my turn to tell my story, I ended with my concerns about my youngest son who would be going into the Israeli military soon (compulsory for all 18 year old men and women). Given that I was a peace activist, strongly opposed to the Occupation, but also an Israeli citizen by choice, I was torn between my political beliefs and my feeling that Israeli army service was normative, good and important, and deep worry for my son who would one day find himself in the West Bank and/or Gaza and would be faced with situations that were morally, psychologically and physically extremely frightening. When I finished my story, one of the Palestinian members turned to me and told me that I was: "…hypocritical… you say you believe in peace and are against the occupation, but you allow your son to go to the army and support him. You should stop him. You shouldn't allow him to enlist." I remember being taken aback, and mumbling something like: "…but what can I do? He is 18 and an adult, and he has the right to make up his own mind. I can't stop him – I can't sit on him and keep him at home…"

We would have reached a complete stalemate, and remained solely in our monologues and I-It dialogue, if not for the gentle help of one of the German participants, a son of a man who had been a high ranking Nazi, who had been hanged for his crimes. Dirk stepped into the conversation and asked the Palestinian member:

> What would you do if your son came home and said: "Papa, I want to be a suicide bomber? How would you react?"
> No such thing would happen.
> Well let's say hypothetically it did. What if your son came home and said that he believed that he had to avenge his people and was going to becoming a suicide bomber? What could you do?
> I would stop him. I wouldn't let him go. I would bar the door. No such thing would happen.

As in the example from the German-Israeli student exchange discussed above, there was no 'happy end' to this discussion. My Palestinian partner continued to believe that I was hypocritical and wrong, and that he was right and moral. However, different

than in the German-Israeli student exchange, the Palestinian TRT member and I continued our conversation not only that day but over a number of years. We did not always agree with one another, but the opportunity to enter into storytelling and reflection made it possible for us to work on connection, and to continue to build our relationship, unfortunately rare between Palestinians and Israelis. And it is telling that it was a German, one of my past 'enemies' as it were, who also entered into our between and who reached out to me in genuine dialogue.

Two main reasons for the TRT's overall success was its ability to create safe and supportive places for inter-group communication (Chaitin, 2004b) and to continue bringing members of the 'enemy' sides today, over many years, in order to build long-lasting relationships. Furthermore, the TRT managed to keep lines of communication open, even during times of intensified violence, as in the Israeli-Palestinian case.

There are a number of ways to create such 'safe' climates, and I will now turn to brief descriptions of some of these methods.

Supportive inter-group and interpersonal communication encourage descriptive as opposed to analytical and critical speech in which the listener perceives requests for information as genuine. Descriptive dialogue comes from personal experiences of the speaker and listener and stresses the importance of mutuality, rather than from an attempt to persuade the other to change their viewpoints and beliefs; it is spontaneous communication, devoid of deception. Such dialogue gives respect and legitimacy for the other's opinion, even if the two parties are not in agreement with one another. Safe spaces create an atmosphere of equality; and an atmosphere that conveys that issues are open for debate, and that different ideas can be considered.

A safe place for communication cannot be created and sustained if the participants have been coerced into taking part in the group interaction. This means that facilitators of such meetings must be honest with potential participants about the aims of the encounter and the use of the materials that will result from such encounters, making sure that each individual has chosen to be there and that s/he commits to respecting the process. Once the encounter begins, this atmosphere of openness and honesty must continue; if the participants feel that they are being manipulated by facilitators' 'agenda' that wishes to bring the group to a certain stance, then they will either drop out of the group or become extremely careful in what they share and how they respond to others.

Safe places in communication also tend to be created and sustained when the ground rules of the encounter are clearly set forth and agreed upon at the first meeting. Rules such as no interrupting, giving every participant equal opportunities to speak yet not pressuring individuals to speak who do not yet feel comfortable doing so, ending with a round in which each participant is asked to make some comment about the meeting, and refraining from judgmental and caustic responses are good techniques.

This point connects to the issue of asymmetry. While encounters between groups in conflict cannot undo the asymmetric power relationships that may characterize the socio-political reality (Coleman, 2006), such as in the Palestinian-Israeli case (Bar-On &

Kassem, 2004), group facilitators can assure that the relationships within the group context are egalitarian. This means that no one participant has more rights than others and that all are granted equal respect.

In addition to this responsibility of the facilitators that are working with Israeli and Palestinian dialogue groups, they also have the further responsibility of working on two more challenges: (a) doing all they can to prevent the dialogue in their 'bubble' from breaking down when increased violence takes place on the outside and (b) helping prepare the participants for reentry into the 'real world' once the dialogue group has come to an end. Facilitators can work on the first challenge by reiterating the obtainable goals of the group – that is, ***not*** the solution of the problem, but rather the achievement of deeper mutual understanding. Furthermore, while they can stray a bit from the storytelling atmosphere, in order to provide people with the opportunity to discuss outside events (Bar-On & Kassem, 2004), they can also frame the discussion within the storytelling context, for example, by asking participants to: "Tell us what you were doing when you heard about…? How do you feel this event has affected you?" By being flexible and sensitive to the need to discuss outside events, it will be easier for participants to make the connection between the small group dialogue and their real life experiences.

Facilitators can help group members prepare for the very difficult second challenge of reentry in a number of ways. They can work with them on identifying their social networks that might provide opportunities for the sharing of group dialogue experiences. In addition, group leaders can help participants (re)adjust their expectations; by openly discussing the fact that dialogue participants will be confronted with skeptics, stereotypes, and fear, and the continuation of the conflict between the two groups upon return home, makes the reentry less fearful. Helping group members plan small steps for reaching out to others in their circles, such as telling them firsthand about their experiences, or working together with a dialogue participant to jointly present their work and new understandings (if possible) are other ways in which reentry will help continue the dialogue process and not signal its end.

Helping people to become empathic listeners is an additional important skill for interpersonal and inter-group communication between former/present adversaries. This is probably the most important, yet the most difficult skill to teach/acquire, since people are often busy thinking about what they are going to say when it will be their turn, and so they do not really listen to the speaker. Furthermore, if the speaker is talking about issues and experiences that are uncomfortable for the listener(s), such as in the Palestinian-Israeli case, or in meetings between descendants of Holocaust survivors and Nazi perpetrators, empathic listening is extremely difficult. It should not be expected that empathic listening will be achieved quickly or that all participants will ever master this kind of listening; this is a dynamic process characterized by numerous ups and downs.

Group encounters that aim for genuine dialogue demand time; therefore, "one-shot" encounters are doomed to failure. A series of meetings need to be planned, with

options for extending the original schedule if possible. It is also important that each meeting be long enough to accommodate the participants, especially those who may have difficulty in opening up in a group or need time before they can begin talking about their experiences. Dialogue is a process, and in order to move from technical dialogue or I-It relations to I-Thou dialogue (Buber, 1958), participants and group facilitators need to be willing to devote time to the unfolding and development of the process.

As a final recommendation, in this non-exhaustive list of techniques, it is important for all group participants to learn how to deal with silences within the group – non-verbal behaviors that are no less important than speech. Silences occur when people are afraid of opening up an issue for discussion, when they are thinking over what has been said, or gathering their thoughts together before they begin speaking. In order to help participants feel comfortable in the setting, facilitators need to learn to respect these silences and not "jump in" in an attempt to put people at ease. It is only if and when extremely long silences become the norm (an extreme rarity), that the facilitator will need to figure out, together with group members, why the group appears to be paralyzed and what can be done to move the group out of the silence into the realm of the spoken.

Conclusions

This article began by noting that the Holocaust past and the Palestinian-Israeli ever-present conflict make dialogue between Jews and Germans and between Jews and Palestinians extremely difficult, if not impossible. So, is it yet possible to bridge 'the impossible' in genuine dialogues between the sides?

Given the amount and intensity of the obstacles that stand in the way of honest and open dialogue between groups in conflict, it is important to be cognizant of these challenges and to address them squarely, rather than attempting to act as if they do not exist. Recognition of the obstacles and attempts to deal with them can help build trust between the sides (Lewicki, 2006) – an extremely difficult process – but a necessary one if the parties to the conflict are to move forward in true peace-making and reconciliation endeavors. What do we need to keep in mind concerning Jewish-Israeli/German dialogue and Jewish-Israeli/ Palestinian dialogue so that we do not enter these doorways with unrealistic expectations that might have the opposite effect of what we wished for, such as bringing dialogues to a quick, and frustrating end?

When Jewish-Israelis enter into dialogue with Germans, the dialogue takes place in the context of deep feelings of victimhood, distrust, heightened sensitivity to any communication that could be taken as a sign of anti-Semitism and fear felt by the Jewish-Israelis. Indeed, as Kidron (2003) and Feldman (2008) have noted, children and grandchildren of Holocaust survivors often adopt an identity that connects them to the roots of the Holocaust past. I noted above obstacles to Jewish-Israel/German dialogue and presented a few examples; this presentation demonstrated that the consequences of

the Holocaust are inter-generational and extremely long-term, impacting the survivors themselves, their descendants, and others in the community, even those without a direct connection to the Holocaust. Therefore, in dialogue encounters between members of these two groups, it is critical to address these intergenerational psycho-social aspects, including issues such as collective memory (Halbwachs, 1992), and the long-term repercussions of that violence on the difficulty that Jewish-Israeli young adults might have in being empathetic to the suffering of this 'enemy.'

One final point, connected to dialogue in this context, concerns the issue of forgiveness. As Bar-On (2000) noted, if the Israeli dialogue partners feel that the Germans expect them to forgive them for the past, this can put up a massive wall, especially if the dialogue takes place between direct descendants of survivors and perpetrators:

> …asking for forgiveness after the atrocities of the Holocaust is perceived differently by Jews and by Christians. While within the Christian tradition this is a necessary and sufficient act for reconciliation, one which any representative of the community can initiate, within the Jewish tradition, no one but the victims themselves are entitled to receive a request for forgiveness from the victimizers. In many cases, this discrepancy creates new sources of tension, because one side assumes it did what it had to do, while the other side feels humiliated in addition to the primary feelings of pain and suffering…" (p. 25).

In sum, then, while dialogue in the Jewish-Israeli/German context deals with a past atrocity, by being aware of its ongoing consequences and salience, it is possible to begin (and continue) a dialogue that moves group members away from rigidified perpetrator-victim roles and stereotypes to understandings of how this past impacts present-day life and to the creation of healthy relationships.

In the case of dialogue between Jewish-Israelis and Palestinians, the challenges are more complex. Given that the two peoples remain embroiled in an acute conflict, in which both sides have deep existential fears, and that makes it technically very difficult to arrange joint meetings, designing and facilitating dialogue between willing participants needs to be handled with extreme sensitivity and flexibility.

Some ways for increasing the possibilities of success include providing as much time as possible not only for personal storytelling, but also for *collective* storytelling – that is giving each participant the space and time not only to discuss what s/he or a family member has endured, but also to share what his society has lived through, as a result of the violence. In dialogues in this context, the interplay between the personal and the collective will be salient. That is, group dialogue will be influenced by both the personal experiences and psychological make-up of the participants (for example, when Jewish-Israelis who served as soldiers in the Occupied Territories share their stories of their army service and their present-day feelings/understandings about this service, or when people who have been harmed in terror attacks, or lost someone dear to them in such an attack,

talk about this) and by the deep collective bonds they have to their families and to the State, which are often characterized by a collective atmosphere of grief and bereavement (Witztum, Malkinson & Rubin, 2001).

Sharing the collective narrative, will, undoubtedly, lead to (loud) disagreements between participants concerning the 'facts' of the conflict (Adwan & Bar-On, 2004). However, dialogue that is simultaneously rooted in the personal and the collective, and in the past and the present, can also allow group participants to see their 'enemy' in a more complex way, in a way that provides opportunities for new insights and for the beginnings of empathy and a shared responsibility to make the future (a bit) less violent. Secondly, by understanding the complex inter-connections between the Holocaust past, the Arab-Israeli wars, and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict of the last 40 years, issues such as identities rooted in victimhood (Adwan & Bar-On, 2001), the impact of collective history (Halbwachs, 1992) on perception of the conflict and its resolve, and family rituals and themes (Berg-Cross, 2000; Handel, 1985) which often serve to keep the conflict alive, can also begin to be addressed.

Dealing with the obstacles discussed in this paper makes clear that dialogue will not provide a 'quick fix,' or even the expectation that the conflict issues will be dealt with and then laid to rest. When individuals and groups in conflict are not afraid to enter into the problem areas and to reflect on intense emotions, over-use of defense mechanisms or group think, for example, then there is the possibility that this reflection will lead to a more lasting change, or at least to a more honest appraisal of inter-group dynamics and relations.

In spite of the objective obstacles that hamper the development of I-You dialogues and relationships between Israelis and Germans and Israelis and Palestinians, we should not despair that such relationships are impossible. The 'objective' realities are human-made ones, realities that can be changed if we should choose to try different pathways to being in relation with ourselves and with our others. Individually, we do not have the means to change governmental policy, to stop the hate mongers, or to halt the structural violence (Galtung, 1969). However, this does not mean that our options are closed. If we succeed in engaging people, who have some degree of formal influence, such as politicians (Kelman, 1999), educators, and other multipliers, in dialogue, then some real changes in deeper understanding of the other can become a possibility. Furthermore, when the communication context is safe, each one of us does have the means to turn to the other in genuine dialogue, to discover oneself in the process, and to begin to slowly bridge the divide of the un-traveled 'between' that previously appeared as an impassable sea.

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