



The Social Healing Project

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Social Healing Project Report

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Background and Context of the Social Healing Project

In 1998, Dr Judith Thompson and James O'Dea began collaborating in the emergent field of social healing with initial funding from *The Fetzer Institute*. James had worked in Turkey in



1977-80 during the civil conflict there and in Beirut during the 1982 war, subsequent massacres and communal fighting. For ten years he served as the Director of the Washington Office of Amnesty International. Judith had worked with survivors of the Cambodian genocide, lived and worked in Israel/Palestine in 1983, and was for ten years the founder and CEO of Children of War, Inc., an international youth leadership program empowering “wounded healers” to become leaders. She later went on to complete a doctorate in Peace Studies focusing on compassion and social healing.

Our initial exploration centered around expanding human rights concepts beyond strict legal frameworks to an understanding of the deeper psychological and social context of human rights violations. The early dialogues we facilitated examined the patterns of causation that resulted in abuse by governmental and non-governmental actors, victimization arising from social and historical conditioning and other causes of violence that resulted in individual and collective wounding. Participants included victims of torture, abuse, discrimination, and international conflict, professionals in the field of conflict resolution, trauma, and psychology and social

activists and academics. The dialogue work intensified from day-long interactions to longer residential gatherings, which enabled us to work on issues of victimization, victim-perpetrator entanglement, and the exploration of wounding and healing at a quality and depth which was life-changing for participants and facilitators alike. One of the dialogues involved a four day process of daily Native American purification lodges and Native Talking Circle process. Many of the participants had experienced torture, abuse, occupation, exile, racism and other forms of oppression. To this day, the time spent together for those who attended remains a truly significant benchmark in their healing journey.

Gradually *social healing* became the primary lens for Judith and James's dialogue and inquiry work. In 2002, a group of 25 peacebuilding professionals from around the world came together in Cambridge, Massachusetts to explore the role of compassion in social healing. This was followed by a meeting in Cyprus in 2003 as a way to move the work out of the United States, so as to reflect the pressing international dimensions of social healing work, and learn on the ground about creative work being done in other parts of the world. In 2004 we convened an intimate three day process on racial healing at The Institute of Noetic Sciences, while James was president there.

Between 2007-2009, Judith facilitated dialogue between Israeli and Palestinian psychiatrists, psychologists and social workers in an exploratory process of "mutual acknowledgment" with James as an international participant and advisor in the work.

In 2009, we received a grant from the Kalliopeia Foundation to explore a synthesis of our learning and investigate new concepts and practices in the emerging field of social healing. Our process has been to examine in greater depth the role of worldviews in the formation and transformation of conflict, and to learn from practitioners how they are understanding and experiencing social healing. Areas of inquiry include: how developments in the new sciences relate to energy fields, the impact of the mind-body health paradigm on social healing, and how consciousness research can be applied to the work of social healing.

The *Kalliopeia* grant supported our work in three phases. The initial phase involved a large number of extended interviews with thought leaders from a broad cross-section of disciplines about worldviews and social healing. The second phase then involved site visits to Israel, Palestine, Rwanda and Northern Ireland and extensive dialogue with leading practitioners of social healing processes in those countries. The third phase involved bringing key people from our site visits and other professionals in such arenas as constellation therapy, circle dialogue process, racial healing and integral theory and practice together for a three day immersion dialogue in the United States. In addition all our conversations have been taped and fully transcribed.

Social Healing as an Emerging Field

Social healing is an evolving paradigm that seeks to transcend dysfunctional polarities that hold repetitive wounding in place. It views human transgressions not as a battle between the dualities of right and wrong or good and bad, but as an issue of wounding and healing. Thus a key question driving the work of social healing is *how do individuals, groups and nations heal from past and present wounds?*

Our view of social healing assumes a relatedness between individual and collective wounding and healing. Unresolved historical wounds carried in the collective memory and collective unconscious can, and do, trigger a complex array of conflicts. This transference from generation to generation of victim-perpetrator dynamics often result in violent confrontation, war, oppression, human rights abuses and terrorism.

This emerging field has many intersecting aspects and our exploration has been dialogic and multi-disciplinary, including these areas:

- Worldview framing and analysis;
- Theory and practice of dialogue;

- Mind/body health and healing;
- Insights from contemporary neuroscience;
- Insights into the nature of consciousness;
- New approaches in individual and group trauma healing;
- Modalities of listening, including compassionate listening and integral listening;
- The science and practice of forgiveness;
- Explorations of atonement;
- Different cultural approaches to restorative justice;
- The process of truth telling and mutual acknowledgment;
- The interface of personal and historical narrative;
- Interrupting the intergenerational transfer of wounds;
- Intergenerational trauma;
- Creative and non-linear approaches to healing and reconciliation through all forms of the arts;
- Processes aligned with positive psychology;
- Innovative approaches such as constellation therapy;
- Psychosocial design work that engages people in creating healthier more sustainable futures;
- Integral approaches within psychology;
- Exploration role of social entrepreneurs and “social artists;”
- Creative use of media for reconciliation work.

Themes Arising in the Field

I. Worldview Shifts and their Relationship to Social Healing

We interviewed professionals in the fields of international peacemaking, international mediation and dialogue, racial healing, mind-body science, trauma recovery, evolutionary theory, social development theory, social organizing, systems theory, psychology and consciousness research on the topic of worldview and its relation to societal healing and transformation. This exploration is a logical next step in this work since it is from understanding the structure of belief that we can best map the healing journey for humanity.

Interviews were conducted with people as diverse as Dr. James Gordon whose *Center for Mind Body Medicine* is doing innovative trauma work in such places as Israel/Palestine and Haiti; Howard Martin, who is a scientist and senior researcher at *The Institute of HeartMath*; Sharif Abdullah, founder of *The Commonway Institute*, which has collaborated in healing and renewal initiatives in US urban settings and Sri Lanka; Marilyn Schlitz, President of the *Institute of Noetic Sciences* which tracks emerging worldviews and the science of consciousness; Barbara Marx Hubbard, leading futurist and evolutionary theorist; Mark Gerzon, a prominent leader in the field of international mediation; Louise Diamond, international peacemaker and integral systems theorist; Jean Houston, evolutionary evocateur; and Joan Borysenko, celebrated for her work in integral medicine and holistic healing. (See Appendix A for complete list).

Here are some of the insights and areas of consensus that came from these conversations:

- There was a general affirmation about the importance of exploring worldview as a fundamental aspect of the work of social healing, citing that one's worldview is "the absolute reference point until consciousness is expanded". Worldviews impact everything, and those that are embedded in the past will imprison us. In the opinion of a number of people, a core question influencing the formation of worldviews on a universal basis is whether or not the universe is safe. One person recalled Einstein's statement: "The most important question a person can ask is: *is the universe friendly?*" With this as a fundamental existential question, the reality that trauma can destroy faith in peoples' sense of safety needs to be closely explored. As one person said, if you see the world as

dangerous, you will be looking out for “others” who are going to harm you. What conditions support the sense of safety and well-being? Understanding this will support worldview change for masses of people.

- Separation is the source of our greatest wounding. At its deepest root “the delusion of separation” dwells in our consciousness – as a sense that we are separate from “God”, the creative principle, the source of life. One person said that we have lost our sense of unity with the fabric of reality and when we recover that we will see the universe as safe and friendly -- once again affirming the need to be safe in the world. Healing comes when we recognize “I am a part of all that is. I am okay. I am divine.” Healing is a quantum wholeness and oneness perspective. It is precisely the old worldview of reductionism and separate parts that blocks this.
- This primary wound of existential separation from the creative principle of the universe has found its expression socially in systems and national identities, which isolate minorities, and are based on exclusionary principles. These principles are fixated on punishing dissidence or cultural divergence, disregarding the need for active civic participation and not investing in nurturing healthy communities. These expressions of separation are showing up in contexts where social isolation, racial prejudice, sexism, religious fundamentalism and other discriminatory attitudes and practices are prevalent. All of the above were perceived as creating *societal entropy* and preventing optimal *social synergy*. Social healing work, by restoring deep bonds of connectivity, aligns itself with optimal evolutionary creativity. Some said that social healing is work that unites with Love as the source of creative social design and the source of an impulse of wholeness. Love is that which holds us together---not as an enforcing principle--but as one which offers us the attractor for choices which heal, connect, and celebrate our essential unity in all of our profoundly beautiful diversity. Love is “the strange attractor” in a sea of chaos.
- Countering the delusion of separation, our global interconnectedness and interdependence is daily being graphically reinforced. This means that we increasingly see that our survival as a species depends on ever more elaborate and complex forms of collaboration. The growing understanding of the nature of complex adaptive systems

brings us into global contexts and global realities, which must be collectively addressed. While fierce local feuds and narrowly entrenched ideologies and theologies continue to tear the fabric of collective health and healing, many see these as evolutionary dead-ends. The scale of wounding becomes an evolutionary road-sign that compels us to change or die. Many argue that it is not just change but transformation which arises when suffering pushes us over the edge of the known and forces us to move beyond the limitations of our conditioned realities.

The work of social healing is to open up the sensibility that transgression is a rupture of the whole. To that end "our first duty is not to hate ourselves."

- In the belief of several, pain and trauma serve a purpose. They help catalyze change. Crisis helps forge opportunity and new ways of creative engagement to overcome seemingly intractable problems. Yet in social healing work we know that while this truth holds true, so too does the reality that people can become conditioned by their suffering and negatively attached to their victim experiences. Cycles of oppression persist when victim-perpetrator dynamics are not dissolved and healed. Thus, some of our interviewees stressed the need for more research to help us understand how and why good people can do terrible things.
- There is a need to move out of ancient punitive ideologies, theologies and crude use of punitive strategies for political manipulation and control. From neuroscience, integral medicine, social psychology, to peacemaking and social development perspectives we need new worldview frameworks which propagate ideas and practices linking healing and justice. At core here there are very complex notions around good versus evil which can end up in abstractions. Emerging worldviews tend to have inclusion, tolerance, and forgiveness as key markers. Some have looked at the dynamic tension between truth, justice, peace and mercy as cornerstone principles in a worldview where societal healing is central.

- There is an aspect of flexibility and openness in evolving worldviews that may be perceived as totally laissez faire by more rigidly defined belief systems but which, in reality, is an aspect of creating a higher synthesis.
- Several people stressed that a key element of social healing work is dealing with deepening peoples' identity definitions from simple to more complex. Narrow identity fixations create narrow fields of perception in relation to others and otherness. The work of social healing is to open up the sensibility that transgression is a rupture of the whole. To that end "our first duty is not to hate ourselves." This relates closely to the concept of non-judgment and compassion rooted as inner experience while at the same time not being morally ambiguous about unacceptable behavior.
- The notion that we live in a field of shared energy with others is beginning to gain momentum and opens up a spectrum of subtle energy and inner work that can be more efficacious in collective healing work than imagined even a decade ago. Field theories stretch all the way out to ideas of universal quantum non-locality and collective entanglement, but are also being explored in relation to heart-fields, the body's electromagnetic field and such concepts as limbic resonance. Social healing work has begun to tap into this science with the awareness that techniques can be acquired to help people deepen fields for deep communication and truth-telling.
- Science is helping us to better understand social fields, social contagion and the speed with which viral memes can influence masses of people. It also gives us a more detailed picture of what happens in the field connection between individuals when tension, resentment, or hostility are released. Science has begun to revise its picture of "the fittest" from the most aggressive to those who are more relational, loving, grateful and forgiving. This, naturally, has huge implications for social healing work.
- While healing must address the wounds of the past it also gains momentum from creating strong pictures of possible futures, new stories gleaned from deep mythic structures, and even engaging in practical future social design work. This dynamic

relationship between future and past, mediated by deep attention in the present, can create clarifying perspectives on the past and create an energy that helps us move towards the future with more hope and trust. Positive psychology perspectives also emphasize creating scenarios for engaging in healthier and happier futures.

For those who have objectified others or been objectified themselves, experiencing another's truth or having the experience of being seen for the first time is profoundly healing. Movement of this kind inevitably shifts worldviews as people have to revise the basis on which others have been objectified.

- A common theme was evolutionary process as a spiral. The spiral represents movement beyond the compulsion to see everything as dialectical. The very basis of western rational process and much of human development has been structured and organized around either/or, us/them, right/wrong, top/bottom frameworks of meaning. But evolutionary process inevitably creates a way for Life to move forward by selection-design, which includes elements that in one context are opposed, but which, from a larger perspective, are woven together in a greater whole. The spiral, which carries a deep connectivity to the past, nonetheless does not get stuck in it--for that would be to choose linearity and fixity over wholeness.
- The ever-expanding spiral is also a model for the evolution of consciousness as we become ever more aware of larger, more inclusive sets—from tribe, to nation, to globe, to cosmos—and back. Holding both the tribe and the planet in some kind of fruitful dynamic tension so that one does not overwhelm or oppress the other is the chrysalis out of which a peaceful, healing and integrated worldview can emerge.
- Disconnection from nature is a pivotal axis for needed change. The recovery of indigenous perspectives is essential in building a global consensus around an ecological cosmology and related strategies for eco-sustainability. We will never heal our world without healing our damaged relationship to nature. Our collective destruction of Nature reflects the loss of a sensibility so necessary for peace and respect for life. Put bluntly, the

current dominant attitude to nature and other species reflects violence, brutality and a form of deadening numbness which is emblematic of all forms of human to human violence.

- This theme relates to another core issue in social healing work —the objectification of others and reductionist attitudes that stereotype people into limited categories. When people are facilitated to engage in deeper dialogue they begin to heal as they move beyond objectifying labels. Some people refer to this as experiencing inter-subjective truth. For those who have objectified others or been objectified themselves, experiencing another's truth, or, having the experience of being seen for the first time, is profoundly healing. Movement of this kind inevitably shifts worldviews as people have to revise the basis on which others have been objectified.
- Finally, it was commonly held that we are on the edge of an evolutionary phase shift and that ultimately healing is about evolution. "We can't heal without evolving." Thus social healing finds its highest calling discerning the information coming through at the edges of the new worldview and translating that into language, maps and tools for healing the historic wounds that have held old worldviews in place.

II. Themes Arising from Site Visits

A. Introduction

After completing the first phase of our work, we entered into dialogue with social healing practitioners from a variety of settings. Between June and October 2010, we visited Israel, Palestine, Rwanda and Northern Ireland, to explore social healing initiatives and engage in reflective conversations with practitioners and theorists who are moving the field forward. Our intention was to get a sense of:

- what social healing means to them within their context;
- what leads to social healing and why;
- what is inhibiting social healing and why.

In February 2010, we convened fourteen social healers from six countries at the Essex Conference Center in Essex, Massachusetts. Our aim was to dig deeper in to core themes and insights gleaned from the recent and the longer term work with a group of advanced practitioners. A framing document was sent out as an orientation to that meeting and an articulation of the questions we felt would leverage emergent knowledge (See Appendix B: *Social healing and the new story*). Participants included a few people from our site visits, others with whom we have worked over the years, and new friends who brought additional social healing expertise and experience in key areas (See Appendix A: List of Interviewees).

Our chosen sites had similarities and differences in terms of culture, core issues and stages of resolution or reconciliation. Each setting has been characterized by inter-communal violence and competing narratives about the nature of the conflict and “the other”. Thus, each is a laboratory for how reconciliation takes place between highly polarized and historically violent groups. In the case of Israel and Rwanda, the role of genocide and its impact on identity and security (real and psychological) looms large. In both Rwanda and Northern Ireland peace accords have provided the restoration of basic security and an infrastructure for social healing steps to proceed, while in Israel and Palestine the conflict continues unabated. Northern Ireland and Israel enjoy far more economic development than Palestine and Rwanda, and all three

settings share a stormy relationship with 20th century colonialism, which has contributed to power imbalances and resentment.

These converging and diverging characteristics give rise to different concerns and patterns of healing. Yet, we found a great deal of resonance in practitioners' reflections regarding some of the basic prerequisites for and stumbling blocks to social healing. While we sought out the people and projects best exemplifying the cutting edge of social healing, we feel that the insights they shared are indicative of larger trends reinforced by the globalization of a new narrative. This narrative incorporates notions of "moral imagination", truth and reconciliation, compassionate listening, interconnectivity, common humanity, grassroots empowerment, ecological integrity and global identity, which have seeped into human discourse via media technologies enabling global conversation to occur and proliferate rapidly. Thus, from one place to the next, a common language and set of shared values and ideals, grounded in the lived experience of those doing the work, is emerging as a new foundation for the future of social healing work.

B. TWO OVERARCHING THEMES

I. Theme one: The crucial role of acknowledgement

One of the things that keep conflict and relational estrangement firmly in place is a lack of acknowledgement. This takes many forms: a refusal to acknowledge what one group has done to the other, a refusal to accurately reflect historic events, and subsequently, a refusal to see the other's reality and acknowledge the other's suffering.

A lack of acknowledgment translates into denial of core aspects of the others' identity by negating either the reality or the importance of their wounds, their grievances or their very humanity. Denial represents the inability or refusal to face the shadow material of self or group by coveting a sense of moral rightness and projecting malevolence or ignorance onto the other. In so doing all manner of violence and oppression can be justified, even genocide.

Acknowledgment is a crucial step in social healing because:

- It validates the other's dignity and the integrity of their reality;
- It rectifies the historic record of events for future generations;
- It creates a social narrative that can be the basis for co-existence and reconciliation;
- It is frequently the foundation for sincere apology and forgiveness.

This section explores three interconnected aspects of acknowledgement: **embracing the negative identity, deconstructing the false narrative**, creating **new narratives**.

a) Embracing the negative identity

When deeply internalized by either a person or a society, acknowledgement can lead to a profound and sometimes unsettling rupture and shift of identity. It requires dismantling the monolithic identification with moral goodness that separates us from the more complete and complex fullness of our personal and social identities. It exposes the unconscious shadow material forcing us to become conscious of our own responsibilities. Professor Arie Nadler, a social psychologist from Tel Aviv University and one of the leading theorists in the field of the *psychology of reconciliation*, calls this deeper psychological step **embracing the negative identity**. He spoke of the need to extend the capacity for memory, making it more inclusive.

“Besides me being a victim, I’m a perpetrator in this context...We must understand that acknowledging the suffering of the other does not un-acknowledge my own suffering and my own identity and vice versa.”

Yitzhak Mendelsohn, an Israeli psychologist and steady partner to our work in social healing since 2002, illustrates Arie's point. Yitzhak has been an active dialogue participant with Palestinians since 1987. In 1994, he was wounded and nearly died in a terrorist attack on a café in Jerusalem. Holding the trauma of this experience and yet continuing to be in dialogue was fraught with the complexities of fear and conscience, anger and compassion. His moral compass kept guiding him toward a deeper scrutiny of victim/perpetrator dynamics and how they co-exist within any given person or group, including himself. His work with Palestinians was simultaneous to work being done with Germans – only the roles were reversed. The Jews were

victims of the Germans and also oppressors of the Palestinians. Yitzhak saw how these roles co-exist within himself and has been able to embrace his negative identity without losing an allegiance to any part of himself.

“Working with the Palestinians, I understood the position of the victims. The victim is tough towards the perpetrator. We were very tough on the Germans, just as the Palestinians are tough with us. We reject any gesture the Germans have to be close to us. And working with the Germans, I understood the Palestinians, because I experienced the same difficulties that the Germans have to be really sympathetic with our suffering. I was that way with the Palestinians. So being in these two experiences was really, really, very powerful.

By embracing both roles within himself, Yitzhak has been able to hold both parts of himself in balance. For some, embracing the negative identity can lead to shame and guilt in ways that can seem, at least temporarily, debilitating – which is precisely why some people and societies are simply unable or unwilling to do it.

Melisse Lewine-Boskovich is a former member of the Jewish Defense League, a radical, right wing organization that denies any Palestinian claims to the land and advocates their violent removal. She went through her own journey of inner acknowledgement when she became a mother and began to see the innocence of all children in the struggle. Now she directs the Peace Child project in Israel which works with Jewish and Palestinian Israeli children in theater pieces of their own making on topics relevant to their lives. She described the nearly untenable sense of guilt she feels from having embraced her negative identity and feels that the Jewish youth with whom she works are rarely validated for what’s good about themselves as Israeli Jews. At the same time she recognizes that acknowledgement of the Palestinian Nakhsa (Arabic for “Catastrophe” and referring to what Israeli’s celebrate as Independence Day) is central to the ongoing suffering of the Palestinians.

When our narratives begin to crumble, our very sense of self is shaken. Yet seeing the falseness of what we have always been told to be true can lead to the acknowledgment of a much broader reality, which may incorporate the truths of others.

“I feel bad all the time. I’m sick of feeling guilty. I wake up every morning sad. Sad about my friend Khalil who was second generation Ichrit, one of the villages in the north bulldozed and

nothing was built on them... Khalil is one of my best friends in the world and he would take care of me if anything happened. And the fact that his whole family and everybody else in that similar circumstance are still suffering unacknowledged pain as a result of me being happy – this is hard for me...so pain goes both ways. It's continuing. The whole thread of my narrative – is it masochistic?"

Wilhelm Verwoerd is the grandson of, Hendrik Verwoerd, a former South African prime minister known as the "architect of apartheid" for his role in formalizing South Africa's system of institutionalized racism. His journey toward acknowledgement began when he became a Rhodes scholar and traveled to Oxford where he met other South Africans, both black and white. Over time, the journey led him to view his identity as the source of painful truths, shame and guilt. He was ostracized by his family. It was precisely in his relationships with Black South Africans that he found the ability to accept himself. It was their acceptance of him that led him to re-integrate parts of his culture and history that he exiled from within himself. He went on to become a valuable member of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

While it is clear from these examples that the task of embracing the negative identity brings with it the uncomfortable task of rupturing the idealized self-image and facing the shadow, each of them used words like "joy" and "liberation" to describe the predominant results of moving in that direction.

b) Deconstructing the false narrative

In many ways, we are a product of multiple narratives. We are embedded in inter-locking family, cultural and national narratives, which provide us with crucial self-definition and norms. At the same time, without the development of sufficient critical consciousness, narratives can become the fuel for violence, including genocide, which rely heavily on false narratives to provide the foundation for dehumanization.

When our narratives begin to crumble, our very sense of self is shaken. Yet seeing the falseness of what we have always been told to be true can lead to the acknowledgment of a much broader reality, which may incorporate the truths of others.

Alistair Little joined the Protestant paramilitary at 14, shot and killed a Catholic man and spent 13 years in Long Kesh prison in Northern Ireland. He felt a sense of deep betrayal when he began to discover that the narrative he grew up with had holes in it.

"My worldview was based on all the things I believed about myself. Superior, in terms of my culture, background, faith, politics. Protestant. British. Ulster. Unionist. Loyalist. Sense of superiority. Where I lived, the town belonged to us."

As he came to discover inconsistencies in what he'd been told about the Loyalist cause, he had to confront his negative identity, which led to a deep sense of fear about what he had done. At one point, the holes being poked in his identity seemed overwhelming.

"All these little things were happening that were challenging me as a human being... thoughts of faith, God, accountability, responsibility and the sacredness of life... to the stage where I got where I thought I had done things that could never be forgiven."

Alistair now works as a dialogue facilitator with ex-combatants from both sides of the Northern Ireland conflict and still struggles with self-acceptance.

In Israel, a growing disillusionment within the army has been fueled by the incoherence between the narrative of moral authority surrounding the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) and the immoral actions being witnessed or experienced by soldiers. This has led to the formation of groups like *Breaking the Silence*, initiated by soldiers, which aims to tell the truth about Israeli occupation forces abuses in the West Bank, and *Combatants for Peace*, which operates in partnership with Palestinian former combatants.

Oren Kalisman, a member of Combatants for Peace, went through a painful divorce from some

The dynamics between these two groups can be viewed as a struggle between the need for acceptance (Israelis) and empowerment (Palestinians).

Acceptance means being viewed as "morally" good, and empowerment means acknowledgment of the truth of what happened in the dispossession of the Palestinians... So the deal is very clear: its acceptance for empowerment."

—Professor Arie Nadler

his most cherished notions related to the moral authority of the army when he received orders to “liquidate” all Palestinian police officers at a series of West Bank checkpoints as revenge for the killing of six soldiers by a Palestinian gunman. *“In our unit we called the operation a ‘terror attack’. In another unit they went further and called it a ‘massacre’.”*

On the other side, Palestinian co-founder of Combatants for Peace, Bassam Aramin, was moved to address Holocaust deniers within his own community after seeing the film Schindler’s *List* while in prison. It was the first time he experienced empathy for the Israelis, and years later he created a workshop in Ramallah about the Holocaust, which met a great deal of resistance from the 25 friends he invited. Bassam explained:

“The occupation is bad and the Palestinians are suffering, and [the Israelis] don’t see that and don’t want to know details. For the Palestinians – the best way is to deny the Holocaust. And when you talk about 6 million, you know – it’s not a massacre of 1000, 2000. Six million. If someone denies that my daughter was shot and killed by Israeli soldier --no no. It’s not the truth. This is the same thing.”

Happily, by the end of the six hours this group asked for another workshop, proving that confronting the truth of history can produce a profound perceptual shift in many people.

Acknowledgement and truth recovery on the collective level takes on crucial educational and political functions in the aftermath of conflict when power balances between contested parties needs to be restored, genocidal ideologies repudiated and co-existence promoted. Thus, truth commissions, memorials, and other acts of acknowledgement, have become common aspects of transitional justice processes, which seek to establish an accurate narrative of events in order to prevent it from happening again. In Rwanda, Freddy Mutangua, the director The Genocide Memorial, feels there is still some threat from a minority of genocide deniers within Rwanda and considers truth “a sacred responsibility”. The Genocide Memorial, like similar memorials around the world, makes certain that future generations of Rwandans will remember the truth of what happened there.

However, in places where conflict continues to rage, acts of acknowledgment become political trump cards precisely because they shift the social narrative so dramatically and can precipitate huge shifts in public perception. By validating the claims of “the other”, acknowledgement

requires deconstructing the narrative that has justified fear and aggression, without which wars cannot continue.

By way of example, Nadler referred to the 2000 Camp David Summit with President Clinton, Ehud Barak and Yasser Arafat. Arafat demanded acknowledgement for the pain and suffering caused by the *Nakbha* and the Israeli delegation refused. As Nadler explained it, the dynamics between these two groups can be viewed as a struggle between the need for acceptance (Israelis) and empowerment (Palestinians). Acceptance means being viewed as “morally” good, and empowerment means acknowledgment of the truth of what happened in the dispossession of the Palestinians.

“The Israelis seek to avoid the label of being morally bad, by psychologically distancing themselves from the act and the victim. So they either say ‘this is nothing, we didn’t do anything’, or, ‘they started it – it’s their fault’. Or, they create distance by lack of empathy, and, in the extreme case – demonization... The only party that can give acceptance to the Israelis are the Palestinians --no other party in the world can give us the sense of acceptance. And we hold the key to the Palestinians empowerment. So the deal is very clear: its acceptance for empowerment.”

The “risk” here – and potential break-through point - is facing the negative identity and deconstructing a one-sided victim narrative. This risk seems so great that the Israeli Knesset passed a bill outlawing the commemoration of the *Nakbha* within Israel where 20% of the population is Palestinian.

In place of official acknowledgment, groups like Zochrot (Hebrew for “remembering”) are taking on the challenge of acknowledgement themselves. They see the issue of the *Nakbah* as “ground-zero” of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and believe that acknowledgement of this by Jewish Israelis is essential to starting a process of reconciliation between Israelis and Palestinians.

c) Creating new narratives

Changing the narrative is a result of and also a pathway to acknowledgement. Instead of directly tackling false stories, these approaches replace them with stories that affirm positive futures and healthy relationships with “the other” as a way to inspire moral imagination. In so doing, they

acknowledge the humanity and dignity of the other and smooth the way for a broader acknowledgment of one's own responsibility in the other's suffering.

One of the most fascinating examples of changing the story as a *means to* acknowledgment and eventually reconciliation, comes from *Eretz Shalom* (Land of Peace) a small group of West Bank settlers who are

challenging some core ideological pillars of the settler movement's narrative. Nahum Pachenik was born in the Kiryat Arba settlement in Hebron – a settlement engaged in on-going violent clashes with the local Palestinian population. As one of the founders of Eretz Shalom, he sees the group's mission as changing awareness and consciousness in relation to the land.



Eretz Shalom (Land of Peace) seeks peace from the bottom up. (Credit: www.frontpagemag.com)

"I feel a belonging to the land. There's a very important difference between belonging and attachment and our movement needs to talk about this. Attachment means the land is part of me. Belonging means I am part of the land. Most of the conflict is about attachment, and I grew up in this awareness. Slowly I understood the need to change this language."

The members of Eretz Shalom are engaging as allies in the daily human rights struggles of their Palestinian neighbors, setting up economic cooperatives, exploring ecologically sound practices and learning to speak Arabic. They support the notion of a Palestinian state within which they would hope to continue living as a Jewish minority. Ostracized by both right and left wing activists, they are attempting to carve out a new story that emphasizes the reality that two peoples feel a sense of belonging to the land and must learn to accept and care for each other as equal tenants of a beloved place. Many Palestinian activists feel that members of Eretz Shalom do not go far enough in acknowledging the actual confiscation of land, and this will likely be something the group will need to confront. Nonetheless their assertion of a new narrative is significant, particularly as it relates to one of the most divisive aspects of the conflict.

Finally, groups like *The Parent's Circle*, *Combatants for Peace* and similar partnership groups doing public education work are also engaged in changing the story. By speaking in schools and public

events they are countering the dominant narratives of both sides by modeling a level of mutual respect, empathy and possibility that is generally foreclosed by mainstream messages about “the other”. At the same time, by allowing the truth of people’s realities to be heard in the context of close relationships, they are making space for everyone’s truth to be acknowledged and validated.

Speaking of their work with teenagers from both sides Rami Elhanan, a member of The Parent’s Circle reflected:



“We Carry Your Secrets” From Theatre of Witness | Credit: www.theatreofwitness.org

"For most of these kids, it's an earthquake. The very sight of seeing Israeli and Palestinians together, calling each other brothers, not blaming each other, not trying to compare whose pain is bigger... These kids are going through a socializing process of dehumanizing the other side, of preparing to go and give their lives... this goes on both sides. And when we are stepping into the class and telling our personal stories and they see the humanity of our stories and they see the power of pain... The power of pain is enormous... it makes a crack. In this crack hope can get in. This is essential. This is the beginning of a very long process."

Similarly, both Melisse with *Peace Child* and Teya Sepinuck with the *Theater of Witness* in Northern Ireland help people build relationship through the artistic process of creating theater with their stories. They both felt that the process served the dual purpose of bringing the players together in empathic relationships, but also inspiring and creating a new story. Teya feels that grassroots theater “offers a communal experience of bearing witness. I think it offers some possibility of opening your heart.... being moved, and seeing the humanity of the other.” Her actors are grassroots people whose stories become the ingredients for mixed media theater event, followed by community discussion.

“We’re trying to tell individual stories, a collective story, and hopefully a meta-story – all in one. Hopefully this opens people to a broader sense of who they are and how they’re connected. It’s a new story created from the old ones.”

II. Theme Two: The Psychology of Trauma and Healing

The social healing paradigm utilizes the framework of wounding and healing instead of good versus bad. Violent conflicts, genocide, human rights abuses, and oppression create deep wounds that manifest directly as individual and collective trauma. Unhealed trauma can permeate memory and get passed down for generations, getting woven into personal and cultural narratives and creating a distorted relationship to current circumstances, which become viewed and experienced through the lens of past traumas. Finally, it all too often results in revenge, creating new victims and new cycles of revenge. Thus, the question of how wounds heal is central to the work of social healing.

This section explores:

- **Intergenerational trauma and cycles of victimization;**
- **Choice, responsibility and moving beyond victimhood;**
- **Healing through relationship to “the other”.**

a) Intergenerational trauma and cycles of victimization

In both Rwanda and Israel, where the devastation of genocide permeates both individual and social consciousness the need to address the massive task of healing is paramount. In Rwanda, Freddy Mutanguha of the Genocide Memorial feels torn about the role and function of the memorial itself, which includes graphic portrayals of the genocide. On the one hand he believes that it plays a healing role in society by clearly acknowledging what happened in Rwanda. On the other hand he sees the emotionally damaging consequences of viewing the graphic documentation of the genocide. His own staff members suffer from constant re-traumatization and need to take periodic time off to cope with it. Dora Urujeni, who works as a journalist, expressed similar concerns and feels there is an increase in second-generation trauma.

Israel is a country born in the aftermath of the Holocaust.

According to Ofer Shinar, a human rights lawyer and lecturer at Hebrew and Tel Aviv universities, 72% of the Jewish public is either 1st or 2nd

generation Holocaust survivors. He

believes the Holocaust trauma was exploited by the founders of the state of Israel, and that the manipulation of victimization continues today—a viewpoint echoed in numerous conversations with Israelis we interviewed.

The horrific realities of past genocide and persecutions coupled with the ever-present sense of threat and manipulation of fear creates a wall of psychological protection difficult to penetrate. As Mellisse put it:

“People say, ‘If the Israelis could only see what’s happening in Gaza they would change their minds.’ But it’s worse than that...the worst thing is that they do know, but they tune out as a survival mechanism -- tune out to the others’ pain in order to survive.”



Genocide victims' photos at Kigali Memorial | Credit: The Guardian, UK

Ofer took this a step further by suggesting that the conflict with Palestinians is integral to Israeli identity, which is built around the construction of a fearful other. Take away the conflict and they have no identity at all. Ask them to reconcile with their enemy before they have healed and risk disaster. This was central to his strong critique of the Parents Circle, an organization with which he had positive, close ties for several years prior to reversing his viewpoint.

“For many of the non-Jewish people I’m often the first Jew. Although I’m a refugee, I don’t behave like a refugee and I also don’t behave like a victim.

I am me.”

-Esther Golan

“If you say ‘I’m bereaved and still I support the Palestinians’... its like [former Prime Minister] Rabin paid with his life. He was a general and supported peace. He paid with his life for that mistake. There are things that are crossing the borders of your ability to conceive. This is a violation of the national identity to have bereaved people saying ‘you should reconcile with the people who killed my son.’ It’s breaching the holiest cow.”

While he is a true believer in reconciliation, Ofer insists that it is premature. *“We need a lot of empathy for ourselves. We need to work through the trauma of Israeli society before we can empathize with the other.”* He is opening a *Center for Hope Education* devoted to this level of healing, but was not prepared to say more about it when we met with him.

b) Choice, responsibility and moving beyond victimhood

The psychology of victimhood that impedes growth and reconciliation is clearly felt on all sides of conflicts. In Northern Ireland, Israel, and Palestine the expression *“this is not a competition for victimhood”* was frequently heard. As the prior section on acknowledgement highlighted, when identity becomes fixed in the moral victim position then it is all too easy for one’s view of “the other” to be locked into the enemy position. Thus, one of the resounding affirmations that seemed to herald a shift in the victimization stranglehold was “I am not a victim!”

Esther Golan’s mother died in Auschwitz. She herself escaped death by being sent from Germany to England at the age of six as part of the *Kindertransport*. Today, at the age of 87,

she travels to Germany to share her story with German youth and is active at home with the Interfaith Encounter Association where she has many Palestinian friends. In spite of her losses, she insists:

“My parents shaped my destination, not the Germans. The Germans did what they did to us, but my destination is determined by the values that were instilled in us. With Palestinians, I encounter them and I am with them and I visit their house and they visit mine. But we try and learn to respect each other, to know about the other one’s religion, what makes him tick and be as he is. For many of the non-Jewish people I’m often the first Jew. Although I’m a refugee, I don’t behave like a refugee and I also don’t behave like a victim. I am me.”

Esther’s determination to be shaped by the positive values of her parents and not the brutality of the Germans represents a choice. This power to choose was echoed by Bassam, whose former life of hatred and revenge was broken by empathy and connection. *“I don’t want to be a victim, because I have choices. If you have no choices, really you are a victim.”* Alistair in Northern Ireland, who painfully confronted the lies embedded in his cultural narrative reflected similarly:

“Are you going to continue to make choices and believe things that come from other people – the media, and the so-called leaders? I got to a place -- and it was painful, still is -- I can’t live with myself if I can’t be true to myself.”

Ali Abu Awwad, a founder of The Parents Circle, encourages other Palestinians to move beyond the victim identity as a path toward inner freedom.

“We have also to take responsibility as Palestinians to stop saying and throwing everything on the occupation. We have responsibility to build and to prove ourselves. Because if you are not free on the inside, you are not free from outside...When you give up feeling the victim, the whole planet supports you. You collect energy and power and you don’t know where it comes from.”

In addition to those we met who have found the resilience to rise above the victim identity through critical awareness of their choices, we did meet with a number of practitioners engaged directly in trauma healing initiatives like the Center for Mind-Body Medicine, which has programs inside Israel and Gaza (and many other parts of the world), and the Hope Flowers

School in Bethlehem. These programs are specifically aimed at supporting peoples' psychological healing and moving them beyond a rigid identification with the victim role. In Gaza, caregivers are being trained to provide assistance to 250,000 children in all of Gaza's schools. One hundred and fifty mind-body skills groups are convened across Gaza each week. In Israel over three hundred clinicians have been trained and a Center for Mind-Body Skills have been established. While the programs are broad-reaching in terms of their target groups and impact (e.g. cancer patients, children of Down-Syndrome, and others), the realities of daily life necessarily create a primary focus on dealing with trauma from war and violence.

In Bethlehem, the Hope Flowers School and Community Center is doing trail-blazing work incorporating trauma healing skills into a unique curriculum for school and community, which also incorporates human rights and democracy building components. It is widely viewed as a model program and is on the way to becoming a learning center for education throughout the West Bank and beyond. Since opening their program in 2005, none of the children who have received support have been engaged in violent activity. This represents significant success given the stress-filled circumstances of their daily life.

c) Healing through relationship with “the other”

The most prevalent theme cutting across our conversations was the healing impact of building relationships with “the other.” From the trust building community dialogues sponsored by the Institute for Research and Dialogue in Rwanda to the on-going story-telling retreats in Northern Ireland sponsored by The Junction, to the deep compassion based work of The Parents Circle and Combatants for Peace in Israel/Palestine, the fundamental ingredient in social healing work across all contexts is relationship building.

While there is a fairly universal consensus among those engaged in solving the conflict in Israel that unhealed trauma and its exploitation are core psychological anchors to the conflict, ideas about how to address the issue differ vastly.

Where Ofer represented a perspective that work must be done in a uni-communal way, addressing the debilitating psychological wounding and the identities forged around it prior to

embracing others, many felt it is *precisely through* building relationships with “the other” that healing the fear can occur.

Rami Elkanan’s daughter Smadar was killed in 1997 by a suicide bomber in Jerusalem. His father is a Holocaust survivor. He is now an active participant in both *The Parent’s Circle* and *Combatants for Peace*. His personal journey took him through real bitterness and anger toward Palestinians into a life-transforming relationship with them. His dearest friend is Bassam Aramin, also father of a daughter, Abir, who was killed by Israeli soldiers. For Rami, it is the inability to feel the other’s pain that is the core of problem, not the inability to feel one’s own.

“If you are stuck with your victimhood and you keep touching your own pain and going deeper and deeper into your own pain, you will never be able to feel the other pain. And this inability to feel the other pain is the essence of the conflict. The Israeli public is mentally ill. Deep inside. I know that because I’ve been there and felt it. When I was 16, I read everything I could about the Holocaust, I saw every movie, I was consumed by this feeling. I look at 18-year-old kids who go to Auschwitz every year. They are not coming back humanistic – rather angry...in a way that they cannot look at Bassam’s father who crosses a check-point as a human being. It must be stopped.”

Rami feels that hope for the future rests in building relationships. He was one of several people who were insistent that the work is not about healing the wound, but finding hope and new life.

“The Holocaust is in the mind and the psyche of the Jewish people forever and ever. It will never heal. No one will forget it ever. Yet, hope lies within Bassam’s ability to pick up the phone and call my father – an Auschwitz graduate -- and say ‘I’m with you this day.’ This is hope. This is a way to change. It’s the same that I can relate to his Nakbha. Not the same tragedy. Pain is pain.”

Rami's reflection that "pain is pain" points to the role of empathy and compassion in the work of social healing. While his conviction was that some wounds will never heal, it was equally evident that the shared empathy and compassion he has found from his relationship with Bassam and others is the source of new life for him. Whether or not this is labeled "healing" seems irrelevant.

Nadler pointed to research showing that in Israel/Palestine it is primarily empathy based projects that have withstood the pressures of disruptive violence. This is a highly significant finding in a place where many forays into dialogue and partnership between Israeli Jews and Palestinians in the Occupied Territories have come and gone – generally destroyed by the fear and distrust provoked by cycles of violence. Thus Nir Oren, co-director of The Parents Circle, spoke with deep respect about his Palestinian partners who persevered in the work of speaking with Israeli teenagers in schools during the 2008 Israeli invasion of Gaza when the daily news displayed horrific scenes of death and destruction and just crossing the checkpoints to come into Israel – always a humiliating experience – was more difficult than usual.

"We were overwhelmed and shocked and we didn't know what to do and how to do it. And I think what saved the moment was the Palestinian group. My colleague stood up and said this is the time we have to continue. If not now, when?"

"There are people in the Parent's Circle – Israelis – that when I listen to them it may be like for you listening to the most lovely music. They are music, they are art. I love listening to them. I engage myself there because they understood. They understood me, first of all.

–Ali Abu Awad

One of those people was Ali, an early member of The Parents Circle, who described it as his family. It was his mother, a prominent Fatah leader who spent five years in Israeli prisons, who first invited members of the The Parents Circle into their home much to Ali's chagrin. Yet, when he witnessed the tears of Israeli parents, siblings, spouses in his own home, sharing their own grief of loss, he realized that they – more than any others – understood him.

“There are people in the Parents Circle – Israelis – that when I listen to them it may be like for you listening to the most lovely music. They are music, they are art. I love listening to them. I engage myself there because they understood. They understood me, first of all. So, for me, The Parents Circle is a family where I find at least one place in this madness where you can feel that you are normal, with normal people.”



**Combatants for Peace meet in shadow of Separation Wall
(credit: Paul Pierce/AFSC)**

The shift from feared enemy to trusted friend can be so powerfully experienced that it might be described as a spiritual paradox – finding a light that can only come in darkness. This reconciliation of opposites inspires Nahum’s work with Eretz Shalom.

“In the Kaballah, the main point of peace is the combining of opposites. If I make peace with my neighbor, it’s not a big deal. But if I make peace with my opponent, this is the main point of the peace. To find a new language with my opposite... When you meet the other, you can find new energy to accept the other in your heart.”

This sense of “new energy” seems quite literal and was often referenced. When speaking to German school children or adults about the Holocaust experience and the loss of her mother in Auschwitz, Ester shared this:

“In Germany, very often I am asked by school children, but also by grownups, ‘Isn’t it difficult to tell the story again and again?’ So I look at them and I say, ‘Did it sound like that?’ And they say, ‘No’,” and they smile, and I say, ‘That’s why I can carry on, because you smile at me.’”

Bassam referred to needing “new gas” every day to continue coping with constant hardships of life under occupation.

“And I found it. It is the other side – the Israelis; the same enemies, the same targets – they give you this power. If there is no Rami Elchanan, you will never find the energy – never! I am full of belief, and its very soon... we will have peace. I look at myself a few years ago and I was on

the other side – like how the settlers think. After my daughter was killed people came to me saying ‘you need to be a suicide bomber; to think of revenge directly.’ I started to think: No, I have a teacher, who 10 years ago had the same tragedy with his daughter. It’s Rami. And I remembered that the first people who came to the hospital when Abir was killed were Rami and Noorit.”

Along with the joy of connection that comes with compassion comes the sense of new responsibility and even burden – albeit a welcomed one. The wider the sense of identification with the other, the deeper the sorrow. According to Ali, *“My life was easier before. Today I’m carrying all of those stories...I’m carrying the enemy on my shoulders...and both nations are so heavy, you know?”*

“In the Kaballah, the main point of peace is the combining of opposites. If I make peace with my neighbor, it’s not a big deal. But if I make peace with my opponent, this is the main point of the peace. To find a new language with my opposite...When you meet the other, you can find new energy to accept the other in your heart.”

-Nahum Pachenik

Bassam spoke eloquently to the same point.

“Now I am worried about every Israeli and every Jewish and every Palestinian inside and outside Palestine – every human being in the world. Then I look at the people – exactly like me. They have hopes they have dreams. Sometimes I see someone very rich – a doctor, a good life. But I see him sad. I start to think about him. I have my own problems, but it means there is another space for others.”

Bassam’s empathic sensitivities led him into a psychological alliance with the memory of the Holocaust that extended further than some of his Israel Jewish partners. In an angry response to the 25-foot concrete barrier, known as The Wall, now being built to separate Israel and the West Bank, some Israeli activists have likened it to the Jewish ghettos imposed by the Germans. Bassam finds this unacceptable.

“I said to him -- don’t be Palestinian more than me.To talk about the ghettos in front of me – I didn’t accept it. I understand what they are trying to say, but don’t use it – it’s not acceptable.”

No. It’s forbidden and nothing to compare.”

Finally, the strategic value of being in dialogue with “the other” as a road to peace was emphasized a number of times. This took on particularly crucial dimensions within the Israeli/Palestinian context where Palestinians who build relationships are often accused within their own community of “normalizing”, which means accommodating to the occupation. Ali stressed that dialogue is a tool for your goal, not the goal itself. For Palestinians, the goal is freedom and an end to occupation. For Israelis it is acceptance and security. The deep awareness growing inside people from both sides is that building relationships is the pathway to peace and a preparation for the future. Mazen Faraj, the Palestinian general manager of The Parents Circle summed it up when he said: *“Peace is understanding the needs of the other.”*

B. OTHER THEMES

- a. Inner development leads to outer development**
- b. Non-violence as tactic and philosophy**
- c. An evolution of leadership**
- d. Seeking justice and forgiveness: lessons from Rwanda**
- e. Art, beauty and the soul**
- f. Appreciating indigenous wisdom**
- g. Pushing the boundaries of identity**
- h. Social healing containers**

a. Inner development leads to outer development

It’s clear from the stories of people like Alistair, Wilhelm, Bassam or Rami that various things occur on the journey that signal major shifts within oneself, and that these shifts led to intense engagements in social healing work. Sometimes the building of deep relationships precedes the inner transformation and sometimes not. Either way, the relationship between individual and societal change was affirmed almost universally. The ways in which this insight was reflected in both personal and programmatic ways represents, we believe, a deeper appreciation of power of personal transformation in effecting the social realm.

As a part of her journey in Northern Ireland, Judith was asked to share her experience with story-telling processes at a consultation for peacebuilding practitioners sponsored by INCORE (The International Centre of Excellence for the Study of Peace and Conflict at the University of Ulster) and the European Union. One of the key conclusions from that meeting was that positive impacts at the intergroup and societal level are contingent on the positive transformational impacts at the individual level. Inner change precedes outer change.

The Hope Flowers School in Bethlehem offers a peace education curriculum that director



Hope Flowers Student, Bethlehem (Credit: Palden Jenkins)

Ibrahim Issa sees as human development and leadership development.

“Peace starts inside yourself. So if you link the “Hope Flowers” school to Palestinian and Israeli peacemaking, that’s only one part of it. I see it as a result. Peace starts with yourself, and this is how we are participating in creating happy human beings.”

Nadler refers to socio-emotional reconciliation (as opposed to structural and relational reconciliation) as coming from shifts in how one perceives oneself, not the other. Thus, when Bassam explained: *“I became more real. I discovered my humanity – not the others’ humanity”*, he was speaking to the profound shifts that went on within himself and his sense of identity, which occurred as he gradually opened to an empathic response to the other’s story. While certainly his shift in perceiving both self and other happened simultaneously, his emphasis on discovering his own humanity, not the other’s indicates his felt-sense of inner enlargement.

b. Nonviolence as tactic and philosophy

While non-violent resistance is not new among Palestinians, the current partnership between Palestinian and Israeli Jewish civilians is new. With the help of an award winning film (*Budrus*,

2010) about one village's successful struggle to move the Wall's infringement on its land, a new chapter in non-violent resistance is becoming more widely supported internationally. Weekly non-violent demonstrations against the Wall in numerous West Bank villages are now well attended by both Israeli and international activists. We traveled to one such village while and walked with New York Times reporter Nicholas Kristof and his 85-year-old mother! (His op-ed about that day, entitled *Waiting for Gandhi*, appeared on July 10, 2010).

Everyone agrees that the steady and committed participation of a small group of Israelis has made a huge psychological difference for Palestinian organizers. There is less consensus around whether or not to strive for a more strict adherence to core philosophical pillars of non-violence since, in many cases, these weekly demonstrations devolve into bitter taunting and stone-throwing and tear gassing.

Interestingly, in conversation with Rami and Bassam on this point, it was Rami who felt that the only thing of real importance is that a joint movement is building and Israelis are risking their own comfort and security to show the seriousness of their commitment to the Palestinians toward ending the occupation, but Bassam disagreed:

"Once I went to Bilin alone on Friday and I wanted to see this non-violence. No one knew me. Palestinians started shouting stupid things at the soldiers to provoke them. And for that, all the day they have tear gas and get shot with rubber bullets. People dying and suffering for nothing. If you say in front of me: 'I hate you, I hate you, I hate you', but I don't want you to use weapons – it doesn't work. It's important to say 'I don't agree with you, but I don't hate you.' Its so important."

The potential of non-violence in the context of this and other intractable struggles is inspiring and it is likely that the discussions about strategies, training and effectiveness on-going within the Palestinian community will continue to clarify the best way to build the movement. When we first met Ali, he was on his way to a meeting of grassroots leaders from 400 villages in the West Bank who were coming together to build a network for non-violent training and organization. For him, embracing non-violence is not simply a strategy to reach a political goal, but a necessary ingredient for personal and communal freedom. His vision speaks to the

broader spiritual and psychological transformative capabilities of non-violence and affirms again the premise of growing from the inside out.

“Non-violence is the art of investing your pain -- where you employ your anger and control it, instead of being controlled by it. In any physical war you fight physical things -- the Apache, the M16, the air force. We are going to create a non-physical army -- which is our belief in peace. Israel can't fight it and extremists can't damage it. And we have also to take responsibility as Palestinians to stop saying and throwing everything on the occupation. We have responsibility to build and to improve ourselves. Because if you are not free on the inside, you are not free on the outside.”

c. An evolution of leadership

One of the processes for community dialogue designed by the Institute for Research and Dialogue (IRD) in Rwanda is to engage local people talking about the best and worst leaders they had as far back as they could remember to the present day. Invariably discussion would move to blaming the educated elites for stirring genocide. They said that they never knew how to question their leaders or even know that they had the right to question their leaders. It was these leaders who subjected them to 30 years of propaganda, which exploded in genocide.

Now, Rwanda is engaged in a different kind of social experiment, where the Kagame government has created and is guiding a new narrative of national unity and reconciliation aimed at creating a culture of respect and human rights. So far, the government is getting high marks for creating a climate wherein social cohesion seems to be occurring. Indeed it was reported by the IRD that most people now identify themselves as Rwandans, not Hutu or Tutsi.

In Israel and Palestine the sense of being tremendously let down by their leaders was a common complaint on both sides. The good news is the sense of empowerment being felt at the grassroots level about taking the task of leadership seriously among themselves and not waiting for the political leaders to figure it out. In retrospect the quality of excitement, organization and ideas being shared at the grassroots level seems very kindred to the energies of “the Arab spring” coming from the region. But in this case, the energy is coming from both Israeli and Palestinian sides.

Nahum was clear that the political leaders could not institute “on the ground” what he and others from Settlers for Peace are able to do, nor do the political leaders even stop to consider the absolute necessity for cultivating grassroots reconciliation as a precursor to peace accords.

Ibrahim sees his own efforts with the Hope Flowers School and Community Center primarily toward developing whole and compassionate leaders for the future. “What we need more than anything in order to create a better future is enlightened leadership. We must start with the children.”

Perhaps nowhere was the sense of disillusionment coupled with empowerment more evident than in the grassroots leadership of the non-violent movement. Ayed Morrar, the community catalyst for the non-violence movement, spoke with real excitement about the successes of local organizing, including his efforts to unite local members of both Fatah and Hamas – no small feat. On the other hand, Ayed was unafraid to admit the fairly universal disillusionment with the Palestinian Authority, referring to both the Fatah and Hamas governing bodies as “dictatorship.”

While he embodies a true demeanor of humility, Ayed is clear about the responsibilities of his leadership.

“I think that leadership abilities grow with the human while he is a child. In our culture and religion we learn if God gives you leadership abilities and you don’t use it, He will not apologize to you. He must ask you about how you use this gift. About myself, I feel that I can do something. Maybe the others feel the same feelings, but they couldn’t do anything. If we want to lead the people we must be in front of them. We couldn’t lead them sitting in our homes. But don’t let anyone feel they are my follower. In Palestine -- no Mahatmas like India, no symbols, no prophets, no followers. There are partners. You must agree that you have many partners and you must be flexible in order to change. If you respect the people, they will respect you.”

d. Seeking justice and forgiveness: lessons from Rwanda

For about 100 days in 1994, approximately 800,000 people were killed in the Rwandan genocide – roughly 20% of the population. By 1996, 120,000 accused perpetrators were still in prisons, taxing the capabilities of a fledgling government to feed, clothe and house them. Between 1996 and 2000 only 6000 cases had been tried by an international tribunal making it abundantly clear that alternative methods would need to be found for adjudicating those being held.

In a bold move, the government turned to the *gacaca*, an indigenous form of conflict resolution that literally means *justice on the grass*. Where the earlier form of *gacaca* had been informal, the Kagame government formalized and codified the process, which incorporated more than 250,000 volunteer judges, together with villagers, to adjudicate accused killers. While the judges do receive minimal legal training, the process relies heavily on the moral conscience of the community.



Gacaca Court, Rwanda. Photo credit: heirborne.yolasite.com

According to Dennis Bikesha, Director of Training, Mobilization and Sensitization of the Nation Service of Gacaca Courts, a key aspect of this judicial process is the confession; and most important is the timing of the confession. If an individual confesses before their name appears on the suspect list the court proceeding is used mostly to ascertain the truth and is less concerned with punishment. Punishment was not the central theme of the *gacaca* process. It was more about how to speed up trials reveal the truth, strengthen and unify communities, and demonstrate to the world that Rwandans had a capacity to resolve their own problems.

James had the opportunity to witness a *gacaca* trial and came away impressed and also balanced about the pros and cons of the process. Clearly the accused was flagrantly lying and did not

come forward with a confession, which likely means he was referred back to the formal court system in Rwanda. Reflecting on the experience afterwards, James wrote in his own field notes (See Appendix C for his full paper):

“Amnesty International has been critical of due process issues in the Gacaca system. But I am not sure that Western judicial process with all its courtroom games is really any better. I can only report my own experience, which was the judicial process, with volunteer judges and without high-powered lawyers, did not seem to get in the way of the truth. It was a breath of fresh air to see people so intimately involved in their own justice system. Of course with high paid lawyers the accused is not allowed to make bald lies or expose themselves as badly as was the case in this instance.”

The gacaca trials filled a huge need within Rwanda society to expedite the adjudication process and, in many cases, to give survivors the truth about what happened to their loved ones. According to Dora, hearing the truth about what happened to their relatives and where their remains are located so that a proper burial can be performed is a form of justice in the minds of survivors.

While the requirements of justice and truth were handled creatively in the face of overwhelming challenges, the matter of re-integration and forgiveness is another matter, and one the government has not addressed. According to Dora, individuals are at very different levels in terms of their ability to forgive. Some are ready to forgive when an apology is rendered, others move forward without apology and still others are too traumatized to consider forgiveness. Yet, in her view reconciliation will not occur without forgiveness. She told a moving story about a nun who was helping prisoners write letters to survivors before being released back into their villages. One day she came face to face with a prisoner who had killed her own family members and realized that in order to facilitate the work she believed in she would need to listen to and forgive this man.

“She was very strong. She listened to that prisoner confessing everything. And they reconciled. I’m trying to show you where our reconciliation came from -- from individual initiative. Not from the national level. So from such individual initiative, it’s happened really -- the

reconciliation between people. From revealing the truth, the truth it really hurts you, but at least it opens a door to you, to reconcile with your enemy or your killer.

As was mentioned earlier in this report, a pressing concern for post-genocide Rwanda is the matter of trauma healing. Hopefully this need will get addressed -- whether by western or indigenous means -- before too long. Nonetheless, Rwanda's experiment in transitional justice, flaws and all, brings us one more example of the trend toward restorative forms of justice-making and the potential that exists when justice is grounded in what survivors and also perpetrators really need in order to heal. Once again, truth and acknowledgment, as precursors to forgiveness and reconciliation seem to be reinforced by the lessons from Rwanda.

e. Art, beauty and the soul

At the final session of the consultation in Derry, Northern Ireland, Paddy Logue, the Research Coordinator for the Irish Peace Centres exclaimed:

"I've been working in this game a long time and I have never, ever, heard the word 'beauty' used before in the work of peacebuilding and reconciliation. The unashamed assertion of beauty, vis-à-vis destruction, is a powerful image for us."

One of the practitioners at the meeting, Paul Hogan, the creator of *The Butterfly Garden* in Sri Lanka spoke of beauty as the core element of healing the children whose lives have been so shattered by the violence of on-going civil war.

"The kids have lost the sense of their own beauty, and the beauty of the place where they live. It is not the violence, but the loss of beauty, that I mourn. We tell the children, 'Everything can be smashed all around you, but take care of your garden. Your garden is your soul. Your soul is your garden. Learn to sweep. The ground of this garden is the ground of your soul.' You know, they say that breath sweeps the mind. And when you sweep the grounds in the Butterfly Garden there is an integration between what goes on inside and outside. We hope that this gradually helps to seed beauty back in their minds, their lives, and their community."

His words inspire deeper reflection and signal a welcome evolution in the understanding and conceptualization of the field of social healing itself, which is making the move toward more right-brain, artistic, intuitive, relational and feminine approaches to the work. In Teya's words:

"Through theater we are tapping into a field of possibility. It's an art form, which can be transcendent because it taps so deeply into the imaginative realm. By appealing to the imaginative, we can move people from a lot of stuck places. And it's deeply emotional. People are moved to tears...tears of sorrow and joy. I've seen peoples' lives really changed by being both actors and witnesses."

f. Appreciating indigenous wisdom

In each phase of our work we have sought to honor the wisdom of indigenous elders, recognizing that restoring the transmission of indigenous wisdom at this time of planetary reckoning will aid us in restoring our connection to the Earth and each other. In our February 2011 gathering, Grandmother Mona Polacca, of the Hopi/Havasupai/Tewa nations and a member of the Council of Thirteen Indigenous Grandmothers, truly set the spirit and tone of our container



The 13 Indigenous Grandmothers. Photo credit: www.readthespirit.com

when she opened us up with prayer and songs from her people. Later she led us in a moving and healing water ceremony, which helped us to attune to elemental energies.

In addition to our own appreciation of indigenous ways, many other social healers are turning in that direction. As previously mentioned, the roots of the restorative justice

movement world-wide rest firmly in indigenous ways of resolving conflicts – whether it's peacemaking circles in the U.S., the gacaca in Rwanda, the ubuntu philosophy in South Africa or family conferencing in Australia or New Zealand. Even those not yet using these processes are expressing an attraction for the wisdom and insights of indigenous cultures. Alistair in Northern Ireland and Bassam in Palestine both expressed desires to learn from indigenous peoples. We feel the ascendancy of interest in indigenous cultures and ways of being is a good sign that more and more people are feeling the need to heal the greater rift in consciousness that came as western materialism unmoored us from the sustaining reverence for Earth and knowledge of life-as-relationship that characterize indigenous ways of being.

g. Pushing the boundaries of identity

Social wounding can cause our identities to contract around just some elements of our fullest selfhood. Often aspects of our collective identity and/or victim or perpetrator roles become fixated, which can inhibit our flexibility and freedom in relating to the wholeness of others and ourselves. Much of the work of social healing is really about freeing contracted identities in order to empower ever-larger frames of perception and experience. Doing that often requires really pushing through psychological comfort zones. In so doing we are aligning more with our commitment to freedom and enlargement than to acceptance from our tribe or society. Bassam's ability to ally himself with the pain some Jews feel at the use of the word "ghetto" to describe the Wall is one example of widening identity to embrace the other. Those who have said "I am not a victim" have made choices to widen their identities in ways that pushed beyond many others in their communities.

Any individual's ability to push their identity boundaries is probably a factor of multiple variables – the extent to which they've healed from trauma, the support and encouragement from family and friends, cultural traditions and spiritual/psychological development. Whatever supports the capacity for enlargement, those who have the courage and desire to continue expanding serve as role models and sources of inspiration. In our circle we asked several people to share with us the insights or turning points that opened them to a fuller embrace of their complex and multi-faceted identity.

Belvie Rooks and Wilhelm Verwoerd grew up in vastly different social realities, but their journeys toward the embrace of a larger identity frame converged at a number of places including alienation from childhood religious roots to the embrace of their ecological identities and the transformative impact that has had on their lives.

Belvie has long explored the many facets of her own identity – from her family history of enslavement to her long-forgotten Irish ancestor to her all-encompassing eco-self embedded in the cosmos and even a transcendent self that came from a profound out-of-body experience in her teens.

Wilhelm was born in South Africa, the grandson of Hendrik Verwoerd, a former prime minister known as the architect of apartheid. His Afrikaans roots, early devotion to the Dutch Reformed Church, and family narrative of prior persecution that attempted to justify social domination, insulated him from the suffering and injustices of the apartheid era. When he traveled to Oxford University as a Rhodes Scholar, he was exposed to other South Africans – both Afrikaners and Blacks-- who began to open his eyes to the realities of the apartheid system. As he deconstructed the old identity and formed deep relationships with Black South Africans he felt liberated by his engagement with South Africa's *Truth and Reconciliation Commission* with its “non-vindictive, non-retributive spirit.”

Both Belvie and Wilhelm shared that they were currently at turning points that were forcing them to continue pushing the boundaries of their identities in ways that were quite challenging, yet aligned with their commitment to full healing and liberation. We were honored to be present as they shared this part of their journey with us.

After his work with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Wilhelm moved to Ireland with his wife who was the South African Ambassador to that country. He immediately began working at the Glencree Peace Center with ex-combatants including Alistair. He confessed that one of the advantages to working in Northern Ireland was NOT to deal with issues of race.

*“But I also know that’s one of the reasons why I have to go back to South Africa. I have to be clear that I am willing to face the unfinished business, which I know is still within me around issues of race in particular...so that I’m not just a third party facilitator, but I’m actually willing to be faced with what it means to be linked to a perpetrator community. But the biggest challenge is always the issue of being a beneficiary. It’s the fact that I come from a privileged, white community who systematically are still reaping the benefits of decades of structural benefits **and** people are NOT wanting to accept that. The racialized inequality and poverty in South Africa screams at you. My biggest fear is how can I engage with that without being over alarmed by an unhealthy sense of guilt? How can you translate that into creative responsibility? That is very much my challenge.”*



Hands planting tree. Photo credit: Ella Baker Center/Belvie Rooks

Wilhelm’s decision to walk into his own fears and sense of guilt in order to be his best self and serve the process of social healing in South Africa was met with Belvie’s equally daunting challenge.

As she and Dedan Gills began organizing *Growing A Global Heart*, a project to honor the millions who died during the slave trade and to plant memorial trees along the transatlantic slave route in West Africa and the Underground Railroad in the Southern U.S., she began to hear a “small voice” inside of her asking, “What about the Confederate soldiers?”

As she described it:

*"I was stunned! We're planting trees for the Black people that were running away from the Confederacy that was trying to keep them enslaved! I'd never had this experience of talking to the still small voice before. It was saying, 'If you ARE who you say you are trying to become, then what about the Confederate soldiers? I sat with it. I wrestled with it. I explained in my journal that I'd still be enslaved had the Confederacy won, that I had relatives that'd been lynched and this is what THEY did. **And the voice was always, 'this is not about them. This is about YOU.'** The long and short is... you talk about the smallness of the self! We've selected trees that breath for the whole -- and then the irony of just trying to plant trees for the Black people? I was being challenged. This small voice -- spirit -- was saying: 'You might not be there, but what about the Confederate soldiers... You sit in circles where you talk about oneness and wholeness, but what about THIS group'? And I realized that I'd selected the one group that was for me outside the realm of family and possibility. And so we've been sitting with it and we revised the project where we're now planting trees for EVERYBODY -- the Confederate soldiers, the Union soldiers, the enslaved, the enslavers, the Choctaw, the Cherokee. And, it's so much bigger. So what I realized is that I thought I was doing this for these people whose lives were lost, but really it was for me -- to help me gain a deeper awareness. I'm not condoning the actions, but by planting and remembering, I'm acknowledging that we're all here and it is what it is."*

Belvie's revelation that "this is not about them, this is about you", underscores the linkage between personal and the universal. In opening herself to the challenge of embracing the enslaver she was making one more step in her own freedom as a way to be a container for the freedom of others.

h. Social healing containers

In addition to traditional trauma healing programs, which serve as great examples of how classical trauma principles are being incorporated to serve traumatized populations, non-traditional approaches are growing in popularity. Some of these approaches incorporate non-local, non-linear perspectives about healing and others seem to attune deeply with subtle energies

and the conscious intention to shift and harmonize fields. In this regard they might best be regarded as containers within which healing takes place.

i. Systemic constellations

Systemic constellations operate on the assumption that intergenerational memory literally lives within us and unhealed wounding in our biological lineage will seek resolution in subsequent generations until it is healed. Constellation facilitators, like Dan Cohen who was a participant in our three-day gathering, utilize the willing engagement of groups of people to represent current and past family members and even beings from the natural world. By creating the intention for healing, this process seems to evolve via the groups' receptivity to the ancestral energy, eventually revealing the wounds that need resolution, and by making them visible, addressing them directly.

According to Dan, the roots of the work come from family systems therapy, existential-phenomenology, and the ancestor reverence of the South African Zulus. Comporting well with shamanic notions of time, space and continuity, constellations work claims to go right to the roots of unhealed wounding making it a valuable tool in bringing closure to the intergenerational transmission of wounds. While it has mostly been utilized for healing within individual family lineages, some practitioners are experimenting with tapping into collective fields of memory and engaging in broader systems healing. Dan's work with our group engaged us at this broader level. Grandmother Mona Polacca, an indigenous elder who was a part of our circle, presented a situation where the destruction of sacred land by white people had deeply wounded generations of Native peoples. By bringing together the past and present of three parties – white destroyers, Native defenders and the Land itself – we went through a process of giving voice to the wounds and releasing stuck energies.

ii. Opening to the natural world

Wilhelm and Alistair take groups of ex-combatants from Northern Ireland into the wilderness as a way to support their bonding and to sensitize them to the healing energies of the natural world. On the one hand, they have seen the wilderness as a container for the men to bond in the face of challenge. But, beyond that it is the unspoiled beauty of place and the accompanying sense of awe that brings humility, vulnerability and a sense of deep authenticity. According to Wilhelm, people refer to it as a spiritual experience and a sense of “being at home” as never before. For some opening to the natural world can usher in a more profound identification with their ecological identity, shifting their sense of self way beyond family, tribe or nation. This shift can be a watershed moment for some people, opening within them an awareness of the larger context of harm to the planet and how that connects to their own. In speaking of his own expansion in identification, Wilhelm likened our consciousness in relationship to the earth as kindred to apartheid.

“The last layer of expanded identity has been the nature-based peace work...which allows some kind of a deep sense of connection with the bigger community of life. I’m seeing apartheid also as something, which not only applies to South Africa to global North-South dynamics, but also the way human beings engage with the larger community in life. Some of the key structural principles, arrogances, superiorities, exploitation that came with apartheid can be applied to the way we’re engaging with the natural world. And that has become part of my bigger sense of vision and of self.”

Belvie Rooks, educator, producer and long-time activist is currently facilitating dialogue projects around healing the legacy of slavery in the U.S. During our circle gathering she told the group about an experience visiting the women’s slave dungeons in West Africa and beginning to “channel the grief and wounds” from the place. She was inconsolable for many days, absorbed in the suffering of her ancestors. After three days her husband, Dedan, finally asked her “*what would healing look like?*” Remembering the words of the elders, the next day she went to the river near the dungeon to do a ritual washing of her feet.

“And as I was doing the ritual washing of my feet, this poem of Alice Walker’s came to mind. When they torture you mother, plant a tree. When they torture your father, plant a tree. When

they assassinate your lovers and your leaders, plant a tree... when they start to torture the trees and the forests that they have created, plant another. It was the first time that that the hopefulness of that poem came through to me. I said to Dedan that healing would look like planting trees along the Underground Railroad -- working with environmentalists here to plant a million trees along the Underground to honor all those people whose names we don't know at a time when Africa is being really critically impacted by global warming. Trees breathe for the whole."

On her return to the U.S., Belvie and Dedan founded *Growing A Global Heart* with the mission of planting a million trees.

The growth of ecological consciousness as an aspect of social healing signals that an important shift is occurring globally as an aspect of the evolutionary tipping point we're poised on.

Compromises to ecological integrity and human suffering are linked. Opening to reverence and appreciation for the beauty and the destruction of our planet may have profound effects on the development of our own compassion and sense of connection to the whole, with potential healing impacts at every level of our identities.

iii. Circle processes

Over the past several decades, the use of circle processes as a way to support the unfolding of collective wisdom and promote healing has been gaining popularity.

As a form of social geometry, circles equalize power and responsibility. Through deep non-judgmental listening to others, and sharing one's own truth, circles encourage a level of reflection and collective wisdom that allows healing to transpire. Based on the principle of self-organizing systems, working in circle – with the support of basic agreements related to listening and non-judgment - relies on trusting that the wisdom of the whole will emerge.



In the U.S., the small, yet growing movement to utilize restorative justice principles as a means to work through some cases that would otherwise be adjudicated through the retributive court systems, has its roots in indigenous principles of healing.

Peacemaking circles are a

fundamental tool in this approach. Kay Pranis, one of the leading U.S. practitioners utilizing peacemaking circles, shared with us one of the reasons why circles are so effective in reconciling broken relationships. She always begins the process by asking people to write on a note card and place in front of them, a cherished value that they intend to bring to the circle.

“Everything you do in the design and conduct of the circle is to help people step in the direction of their best self. And the values that people put out always describe their best self, no matter what the group is. I’ve come to believe that those are universal. That in fact they’re in our genes. Human beings evolved in community. Genes have to carry information about what it means to be in good relationship with others. And that’s what always comes out in this sort of round. So in a very conflictive situation, the question would be: what value would you like to bring to this process?”

By “calling out” our best selves, circles create “appreciative” containers that organize around the positive aspects of our common humanity.

III. Suggestions/Reflections from the field of practice

On the final day of our Social Healing gathering in February 2011, our invited group of advanced practitioners worked in teams to consider next steps and key considerations for the field of social healing. Here is a harvesting of our collective wisdom.

Core insights, considerations and questions:

- Social healing offers a new vision of expanded identity as central to the work.
- This is not just about trauma healing; structural violence needs more attention.
- Social narrative is central to social healing.
- We need social enactment that mirrors what social healing looks like.
- Addressing fear and loss are key drivers in the work.
- The inclusion of earth-based consciousness as an aspect of our identity and the appropriate methods for realizing this are new and essential aspects of the work of social healing.
- As a movement and field of practice, social healing incorporates multi-dimensional and non-linear approaches that include subtle energies and a relationship to ancestors. How do we organize and build a movement around this?

Some possible next steps:

- Continue face to face meetings complemented by cyberplace conversation space, teleseminars and internal networking to continuing developing the field.
- Begin developing curriculum and professional development materials with an eye toward cultural transferability in language (concepts) and practice.
- Put together a vision paper on where we'd like to see the social healing community in five years – both content and institutionalization. Get contributions from this group of advanced practitioners and others.

IV. Acknowledgements

We are extremely grateful to the Kalliopeia Foundation for its support of this crucial phase of our work. This support has taken the inquiry into the nature and expression of the work of social healing to a new level of articulation, visibility and community participation. By so doing, social healing as a paradigm – a component of an emerging worldview of interconnectivity and wholeness – has been greatly strengthened and grounded into the language, theory and practice of a growing network of practitioners and seems to be on the brink of going viral. We also wish to thank particular people who really helped us in this phase of our journey. Logistical support and on-site coordination was contributed by the following people: Hanna Knaz (Israel/Palestine), Dora Urujeni (Rwanda), Maureen Hetherington (Northern Ireland) and Lisa Abby (Social Healing Gathering in Essex, MA). In addition we thank Yitzhak Mendelsohn for his design and facilitation collaboration during our Social Healing Gathering and Molly Rowan Leach for design assistance in producing this report.

Appendix A: List of Interviewees

People we interviewed about worldview and social healing:

Sharif Abdullah	Commonway Institute
Don Beck	Spiral Dynamics Integral
Joan Borysenko	Prolific Author, Expert on Mind-Body Medicine
Mirabai Bush	Contemplative Mind in Society
Louise Diamond	Global Systems Initiatives
Duane Elgin	Author, Media Activist
Mark Gerzon	Mediator's Foundation
James Gordon	Center for Mind-Body Medicine
Jean Houston	Jean Houston Foundation
Barbara M. Hubbard	Foundation for Conscious Evolution
Howard Martin	Institute for HeartMath
Corinne McLaughlin	Center for Visionary Leadership
Dena Merriam	The Global Peace Initiative of Women
Marilyn Schlitz	Institute of Noetic Sciences
Diane Williams	Source of Synergy Foundation

People we interviewed on site visits:

Israel and Palestine

Bassam Aramin – Co-Founder, Combatants for Peace; Member, The Parents Circle
Ali Abu Awad - Founding member, Bereaved Family Forum
Rami Elhanan – Member, The Parents Circle and Combatants for Peace
Mazen Faraj – Co-Manager, The Parents Circle
Esther Golan – Holocaust Survivor

Neftali Halberstadt - Center for Mind-Body Medicine, Israel
Melila Helner-Eshed – Professor of Jewish Mysticism, Hebrew University
Ibrahim Issa – Director, Hope Flowers School and Community Center, Bethlehem
Elias Jabbour – Founder and Director, House of Hope International Peace Center, Shefar'am
Dafna Karta Shwartz - Director, Sulha Peace Project
Melisse Lewine-Boskovich - Director, Peace Child Israel
Yitzhak Mendelsohn -Psychologist and Activist
Ayed Morrar - Budrus village organizer of non-violence
Iltezam Morrar - Budrus village organizer of women's non-violence
Norma Musih - Education Director, Zochrot
Arie Nadler – Professor of Social Psychology, Tel Aviv university
Nir Oren - Co-Manager, The Parents Circle/Bereaved Family Forum
Nahum Pachnik - Founding member, Settlers for Peace
Ofer Shinar - Human rights lawyer, lecturer, Tel Aviv University and Hebrew University
Ayelet and Tzvika Shahak - Founding members, The Parents Circle

Rwanda

Dennis Bikesha – Director of Training Mobilization and Sensitization, Nat'l Service of Gacaca Courts
Jean-Baptiste Habyalimana – Director, National Unity & Reconciliation Commission
The Institute for Research and Dialogue
Cara Jones - Fulbright Fellow in Burundi visiting Rwanda
Freddy Mutanguha – Director, Genocide Memorial
Dora Urujeni – Congolese Psychologist focusing treatment on survivors
Josianne Zeyer - Tutsi College Student

Site visits to:

The National Genocide Memorial
Nyamata Genocide Memorial

Northern Ireland

Gerry O'Hara - Former Mayor of Derry, Sein Fein politician; Director, An Gaelaras Center (Irish Language Arts and Cultural Center)

Maureen Hetherington - Director, The Junction, Derry

Alistair Little - Facilitator, Ex-combatants project, Glencree Centre for Peace and Reconciliation, Ireland

Anthony McCann - Founder and Director, Crafting Gentleness, Derry

Teya Sepinuck - Founder and Director, Theater of Witness

Wilhelm Verwoerd - Director, Sustainable Peace Network; Glencree Centre for Peace, Ireland

Social Healing Intensive Dialogue

February 10-13, 2011

Essex Conference and Retreat Center, Essex, MA

Lisa Abby - Art and Song for Transformation

Laila Atshan - UNICEF Social Worker, Palestine

Dan Cohen - Facilitator, Hidden Solutions Constellations

Maureen Hetherington - Director, The Junction, Derry

Yithzak Mendelsohn - Psychologist and Activist

James O'Dea - Co-Director, Social Healing Project

Saroeum Phong - Cambodian Facilitator, Peacemaking Circles

Grandmother Mona Polacca - Hopi/Havasupai/Tewa Elder, Council of the 13 Indigenous Grandmothers

Belvie Rooks - Educator, Producer; Co-Founder with Dedan Gills of *Growing a Global Heart*

Raul Quinones Rosado - Co-Director, C-Integral; Social Justice Educator, Scholar, Author

Judith Thompson - Co-Director, Social Healing Project

Dora Urujeni - Rwandan journalist, Psychologist, Qualitative research w/ Johns Hopkins: Gacaca court system

Kay Pranis - Author, Trainer, International expert, Peacemaking Circles

Wilhelm Verwoerd - Director, Sustainable Peace Network; Glencree Centre for Peace, Ireland

Appendix B: Paper

Social Healing and the New Story: Reflections for February 10-13th gathering

Judith Thompson, Ph.D.
The Social Healing Project

Introduction

We live in an exciting time. As cultural historian, Thomas Berry put it: “We are between stories.” The old story – bracketed on the one side by reductionist scientific materialism, and on the other by institutional religious dogmas – is no longer able to guide us toward human or planetary flourishing. Instead, the chasms created by both science and religion, and the various social philosophies they spawned, are implicated in pushing us toward the precipitous edge upon which we now stand. At this edge we see both breakdowns and breakthroughs. Our gathering is an invitation to explore this edge.

While the story of scientific materialism has been part of our evolutionary journey, it has created a map of reality - a worldview - that de-legitimized a vast portion of wisdom and experience. It placed reason over intuition, intellect over emotion, material over spiritual, objectivity over subjectivity, exteriority over interiority, and condensed this into a story that we live in a mechanistic, material world that can only be known through objective and measurable observation in which human reason reigns supreme.

Institutionalized religion upheld a story that gave male authority figures the power to interpret and mediate purported divine laws and construct theological justifications for power over

women, children, the natural world, and non-believers. While scientific and religious stories were at odds with each other, both saw it in their interests to label metaphysical or spiritual worldviews outside their boundaries as heresy, superstition or witchcraft.¹

Yet ironically, science itself has now begun to step into the realm of the mystics. The “new sciences” story finds biologists and neuroscientists astounded by the hitherto unstudied capacities of the human brain and heart, indicating our ability to intentionally amplify love and compassion. It finds psychologists exploring the territory of contemplatives and revealing a map of human consciousness far beyond the individual ego-self. It finds physicists discovering that the presumed separation of observed and observer doesn’t exist. Much like the African worldview of Ubuntu -- “I am because you are” – all things exists as a communion of subjects, not an assortment of objects.

The new story frames the human journey, not within the context of tribes or nations, but embedded in a constantly evolving planet and cosmos, interconnected and interdependent at every level. The implications of this framing could signal dramatic changes in every field of human endeavor.

The new story of social healing: The move toward wholeness

The trends we are seeing within restorative justice, reconciliation, transitional justice, dialogue and other forms of peace practice, are evidence of new ways of addressing human conflict that are moving beyond the old dichotomies. We have chosen to name this trend social healing partly because we see an evolving paradigm that is not fundamentally hinged around the dualities of good vs. bad and right vs. wrong, but is rather inclined toward viewing human conflict through the lens of wounding and healing. Social healing, then, is not guided by revenge, retribution or punishment, but rather by the compassionate response of relating to all people – victims, transgressors and bystanders alike – as inextricably connected, and as wounded by past hurts, including the built-in, often invisible social codes woven into the old story.

¹ The old story is primarily a Euro-Western story. While other stories have continued to exist, the scientific and religious worldviews of the West have been vigorously exported, adopted or asserted and the implications of these stories have been universal.

For the old story itself has been wounding – promoting and valuing a totally imbalanced profile of human development that enshrines cognitive intelligence at the expense of emotional, social and spiritual intelligence, and allocating the former to only certain genders, cultures and groups. Part of the work of social healing then, involves reclaiming and re-engaging the totality of our human capacities and mending the splits between masculine and feminine ways of being and knowing. “Healing” means “to make whole”, and thus we find it a compelling label for our common work.² Particularly in this time of transition, where we are in-between stories, healing that leads to wholeness may lead to transformation.

Each of us attending this gathering carries a piece of the new story. We also share common historic commitments to addressing the human suffering incurred by human-to-human transgressions, inter-group conflicts, oppression and domination of one group over others, the violation of human rights on all levels and mass atrocities.

We recognize the delicacies and complexities of this work, especially when we face the enormity of the wounds and the persistence of the old story. Finding paths that honor the needs for justice, mercy, truth and peace engage us in a continual learning process-- one that we will walk together. ³

Who we are and what we bring

Our gathered group includes people who have been pushing forward the frontiers of social healing. We are engaged in:

- Developing, applying and articulating the theory and practice of peacemaking circles as a way of doing “justice-as-healing”;

² We recognize that the healing paradigm is one lens through which to view the evolutionary edge of our common work and we welcome other frames of reference as part of our dialogue together.

³ See John Paul Lederach’s *The Meeting Place* for more reflections on these four social energies.
<http://www.colorado.edu/conflict/transform/jplchpt.htm>

- Preserving, protecting and applying indigenous knowledge;
- Healing the intergenerational wounds of slavery through deep dialogue and an exploration of the multiple identities we all carry;
- Healing the intergenerational wounds of the Holocaust through dialogue;
- Inviting youth from inner city neighborhoods to re-story their lives through personal, cultural, national, bio-regional and cosmic identities;
- Healing personal and social conflicts by working with energies held in the collective consciousness of our bio-lineage across time and space;
- Engaging in transitional justice processes in Rwanda and South Africa;
- Employing story-telling as a means for seeing beyond the divisions of self and other in post-conflict settings and experiencing compassionate connection and the will to reconcile;
- Being in the natural world as a partner/actor in the reconciliation process;
- Creating frameworks and practices to integrate inner and outer liberation within the context of historic oppression;
- Finding connection and solidarity across groups in the midst of hot conflict through the doorway of compassion for mutual loss and suffering;
- Working through personal or familial transgressions in the context of conflict and supporting others to do the same;
- Engaging in hands-on post-conflict dialogue work in multiple settings and bringing a systems perspective to the field of practice;
- Performing tireless acts of kindness and commitment in building relationships at great personal risk in the midst of hot conflict;
- Exploring the crucial role of compassion in the process of social healing;
- Consolidating and articulating a science of peace that incorporates insights from the new sciences to peace practice.

Many threads weave us together.

- We have all experienced the sense of sacredness in our work, the deep sense of realignment to something larger when we feel compassion toward a former enemy, or witness the healing of severed relationships;
- Many of us utilize rituals, the arts, music and other creative ways of expressing and knowing;
- Many of us are we are highly skilled in dialogic practices;
- Many of us engage in contemplative, shamanic or spiritual practices that support our inner development and enhance our outer work;
- We are all passionate about healing the wounds of the past and co-creating a new story for the future.

A few emerging themes and questions:

In our own experience as explorers into the field of social healing, a number of core themes – all of them overlapping -- seem to be emerging for us. We are eager to share others' experiences and perspectives in the spirit of being a learning community, so we are sharing these simply as food for thought, and in no particular order of importance or categorical coherence!

Finding the balance between truth, justice, peace and mercy

Transitional justice processes represent evolutionary social experiments within the social healing paradigm. They seek to combine the right amount of compassion and mercy to balance the requirements of justice and truth. They seek to restore the curative normality of peace to severely stressed and traumatized societies without sacrificing the reparations and adjudications necessary to honor victims' grievances and incorporate important social moral lessons. There is a great deal of social learning going on in this arena.

Questions: How would you describe the creative tension between these four social energies within your particular context? Which of these four social voices has the hardest time being heard and why? Is there some other formulation that better describes the complexities of transitional justice within your context?

The complexities of forgiveness

Forgiveness seems to be both a private matter and a social process. Some people forgive because it frees them from bitterness and releases them from the past – regardless of whether or not they have received an apology. Others require an apology coupled with a sense of real remorse, making it a relational and mutual process. In some cases the national narrative about forgiveness seems to betray the ability of people to genuinely move through the psychological, emotional and moral complexities incurred by the transgressions.

Questions - What is your experience of forgiveness (yourself and as a practitioner supporting others' healing)? How important is it to the work of social healing? What does forgiveness mean within your context? What is the relationship between forgiveness and human development? What needs to happen for national narratives of forgiveness to respect and support personal and communal processes of healing?

Compassion, connection and identity

At its root, compassion means “to suffer with”. It is an emotion and an awareness that arises when one experiences and understands the suffering of an other as resonant with one’s own. As such, it has myriad opportunities to take root in settings of great suffering engendered by social and political violence.

Organizations like The Bereaved Family Forum in Israel and Palestine have been able to survive the disruptions of continued violence where other groups have not, because, at its core, the relational glue in the group is the experience of shared loss and the deep sense of knowing the other through that common experience.⁴ In compassion, the walls of separation fall to the experience of common humanity creating a new community (common-unity). The bonds within

⁴ Even prior to the founding of the BFF, social science research in Israel was showing that the only activities across the Green Line that seemed to survive episodes of intense and disruptive violence were empathy based.

this community can be so strong that former enemies have expressed feeling closer to each other through compassion than they do with almost anyone else they know.⁵

This illustrates the paradoxical quality of compassion which arises from the ground of suffering, yet is often experienced as great joy. One researcher groups compassion together with joy, gratitude and awe as being emotions – revelatory of existential meaning.⁶ They are all characterized by a will-to-openness as opposed to a will-to-power. In this light, compassion alters the valence of relational experience remarkably from closed to open; contracted to expanded.

This movement of identity matters deeply in settings where the traumas of war, humiliation, and oppression, and the indoctrination of otherness and superiority have reinforced and wounded parts of our identities that relate to group belonging. From the perspective of the evolution of consciousness, we might say that the experience of compassion moves us toward a transpersonal self – where identity is located within the experience of connectivity with others. In this way, we might view the work of reconciliation and restorative justice as evolutionary activities.

Question: What are your observations about how identity shifts through the work you do? What is your own theory about what happens when people experience larger or smaller frames of identity?

Using stories to create new social space

Stories are the expression of our subjectivity in the world – the way we see, experience, interpret and make meaning of our experiences. There are individual stories; group, cultural and national

⁵ Members of the BFF or organizations like One by One, which brings together 1st, 2nd and 3rd generation Holocaust survivors and descendents of the Third Reich, have expressed this sense of deep connection that seems to supercede other relationships they have.

⁶ Robbins, B. D. (2003). *Joy, awe, gratitude and compassion: Common ground in a will-to-openness*. Retrieved January 21, 2011, from the World Wide Web: http://www.metanexus.net/conference2003/pdf/WOLPaper_Robbins_Brent.pdf

stories, and they are conveyed through words and all kinds of media - art, films, music, theater, etc.

Stories change as healing – or conversely wounding – transpires. Safe spaces for deep sharing and listening, where compassionate witnessing can occur, appear to offer transformative possibilities for stories to reveal their deepest healing potential. Thus many projects, organizations and initiatives are utilizing storytelling as a means to create new social space for reconciliation and restorative justice.

On the most expanded level – as this paper is exploring – there may be an interactive dynamic between micro level and macro level stories. The “new story” metaphor that we are using here confers a vision and a sense of place in the universe that may inspire individuals to re-frame their individual story. Similarly, as individual and groups move from trauma to healing, their narratives may create the context for hope and even joy to enter the social space and give birth to new macro stories of belonging.

Question: What is the role of storytelling in your work? What have you noticed about how it shifts the social space? How would you describe the transformative power of stories and their potential for human transformation?

Uncovering deep layers of meaning through dialogue

In addition to the space created for individual stories to be shared and transformed, deep dialogue as a means of inquiry and reflection reinforces intersubjective knowing that is not the property of one, but of many. In this way we see a fuller picture of reality and create a democratized space for the creation of knowledge. Dialogue as a function of “presence to the whole” facilitates the flow of meaning through the group (which can be just two as in Buber’s I-Thou dialogue). Circles and councils seem to tap into this field of collective wisdom and often reveal a story quite unexpected by members of the group.

Question: What are your experiences with transformative dialogue? Have you ever found that dialogue revealed information and experiences quite new to the group?

Understanding the relationship between individual and social healing

The revered monk, Maha Ghosananda, known as the Cambodian Ghandi, was famous for his oft repeated saying: “A peaceful heart makes a peaceful person. A peaceful person makes a peaceful community. A peaceful community makes a peaceful nation. A peaceful nation makes a peaceful world.” The notion of individual transformation – while now listed as a change theory for peace practice by one noted group of peace scholars (see <http://www.sfcg.org/Documents/dmechapter2.pdf>), is not given much attention due to difficulty in creating measures to assess it (though they have concluded that personal transformation coupled with social actions is a salient approach).

Yet, the new sciences paint a different picture – at least theoretically. From a systems perspective we cannot separate the parts (individuals) from the greater whole (family, group, nation, etc), but how that translates to social transformation isn’t clear. We can see how the wounding of individuals has impacts on families, groups and nations, so perhaps we can speculate that healing does the same.

Going a step further, the science of energy fields shows us that with intention focused on positive emotions like love, compassion and peacefulness, we can cohere the energetic field of the human heart with others’ and support ever greater fields of positive, healing energy. Organizations like the HeartMath Institute are doing extensive research in this area.

(<http://www.noetic.org/library/publication-articles/resonant-heart/>)

Thus, it might be suggested that all social groups have “social fields” comprised of powerful collective emotions arising from common beliefs, experiences and stories. Generally these are held in the collective unconscious, but when attention and intention are focused on them, they may be more potentially directed (for good or ill).

The term “collective resonance” used by a growing number of scholars and practitioners refers to the sense of connection felt intuitively, energetically and physically within a group. In her research into this phenomenon, Renee Levi, gathered stories from groups working in 32 different contexts and asked them to describe their experiences of group resonance and what they felt contributed to it. She lists vulnerability, silence and story-telling among the top “resonance shifters”. (<http://www.resonanceproject.org/practice1.cfm?id=83&pt=3>)

South African psychologist Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela, who served on the TRC’s Human Rights Committee refers to the idea of “making public space intimate”. Perhaps this intimacy is borne from the silence, vulnerabilities and stories that emerge from compassionate witnessing.

The above ideas correlate with the fact that more and more practitioners doing the work of reconciliation, restorative justice, dialogue, and transitional justice are placing attention on the qualities of space and presence which support healing. Every setting for humans gathering is a container. Containers that advance healing bring particular qualities. Thus, the word “container” has come to mean, not only the physical space, but all factors in the environment that enhance a sense of safety as well as a sense of depth and connectedness within and among group members. This includes the quality of attentiveness directed toward deep listening, sharing and witnessing.

Question: What is your own theory of social transformation? What is your thinking about the relationship between individual and social healing? What are your experiences of group resonance or collective intelligence and do you think they matter? Why or why not?

Revisiting the intention of our meeting

We envision our time together as a learning circle – the formation of a learning community. We hope to provide enough structure to offer initial momentum and enough fluidity to allow the

wisdom of collective intelligence to guide us toward what is emerging in the field of social healing.

Our intention is to ask the questions that will stimulate the deepest thinking and knowing about our common work. We are particularly eager to surface the core themes and core questions that run through the field of social healing and begin to name and author our own collective story – a kind of state of the field of social healing. We know that such a naming is neither definitive nor exhaustive, but rather suggestive of what's emerging. We recognize that articulating, framing and posing both core themes and core questions helps to shape the field and offer a structure for its continued unfoldment. As such we understand that ours is a constructionist activity – utilizing discourse and shared experience as a means to create a reality.

We align with the principles of participatory knowing. We will work in circle, in full group and smaller groupings. We will seek your input as we go along and intend as full a harvesting as possible of our collective insights and experiences as a template for next steps and further exploration in this area.

We ask you to bring the core themes and questions that you carry along with your curiosity and desire to grow together at the edge of social healing.

Appendix C: Paper

Notes from a Rwandan Gacaca Trial held in the outskirts of Kigali

James O'Dea

Co-Director, Social Healing Project

Josianne translated by whispering into my ear; judges gave permission for this. The judges had been informed that the government had given me special permission to attend.

The community crowds into a school room; the judges remind them of the process: anyone is permitted to ask a question or to speak, they must raise their hand and address their questions through one of the judges; their questions can be of a cross examining nature. Witnesses for the defendant are not allowed into the room until they are called. Once they are called they must remain in the room so as not to contaminate the witness pool. Everyone is reminded that one of the panel of judges has been selected to write everything down. At the end of the process the defendant is read back everything he has said and he must reconfirm the accuracy of the court record.

In this case the prisoner, the accused, had been found guilty by a regular court of participating in a murder during the genocide but he was referred to Gacaca partly because he had maintained his innocence and partly because the wife of the victim wanted a true accounting of what happened.

Judge: Close to the time of the murder of Osman you have admitted that you were with a group of people carrying spears and machetes. Why were you with them? Why were they carrying machetes?

Accused: The government had ordered us to kill Tutsis. But I didn't participate in the killing. That day we just wanted to question the man who was later murdered.

Judge: How were you different than the killers?

Accused: I was amongst killers but not a killer.

One of the panel of five judges reminds him that he can be imprisoned for telling a lie; she then reminds everyone in the room that they have the power to send anyone telling a lie to prison for six months to two years.

Judge: When the men with machetes surrounded Osman what did they say?

Accused: They promised they were not going to kill him they just wanted to ask him questions.

There is an audible gasp of incredulity in the room; as if this is a most unlikely situation

Accused: I was concerned about him. But then Osman told me he was not worried. "I know these men. My house has been burned to the ground but these men they are going to help me."

There is now a wave of suppressed laughter as the community members present again seem to recognize that this is a highly improbable statement to be made by a Tutsi surrounded by a group of Hutus carrying clubs and machetes. My own gut tells me the accused is a very unskillful liar.

The accused now calls in as a witness a very old Hutu; he has the appearance of a Muslim elder. He walks in with painfully slow steps resting to breathe somewhat dramatically and assisted by the use of a cane.

The wife of the victim stands up. She needs to explain something to the court before they hear the testimony of this witness. She claims her husband was taken by some men to the very house

of this elder who is about to testify. She tells the court that she now understands that this elder told the group holding her husband “he is one of the cockroaches we have been told to get rid of.” (National broadcasts were indeed identifying Tutsis as inyenzi—cockroaches).

Judge: What do you have to say in response to this? Did a group of men with machetes bring her husband to your house?

Witness: He was brought to my house by one person; and that person was a soldier in the army. The soldier said the victim was being sought by the government and he wanted to know if I knew him. I told the soldier I did not know this man and the soldier took him away.

Judge: Why did this soldier bring him to you?

Witness: Because the soldier knew me.

Judge: How did he know you?

Witness: When I was sick that soldier and I were in the same hospital. He was in the next bed to me. We got to know each other well.

Judge: What was his name? Where was he stationed?

Witness: I don't know.

Judge: How long were you together in hospital?

Witness: Weeks!

Judge: But you don't even remember his name. And he then appears out of nowhere with the victim?

Again there is a ripple of disbelief in the room. The judge recognizes someone whose hand is raised.

Community member: I am sure the judges are aware that half an hour after being taken to this witness's house the victim was speared, bludgeoned and hacked to death.

After this the witness for the accused is allowed to stand down but not to leave the room. This time the wife of the victim asks the judges who she can call her own witness. They agree. The witness is about 30 years old and he explains how he had been given the victim's property by members of the Hutu community on the day of the murder. But soon after he was given the property he decided to flee the area. His conscience did not feel good about receiving the victim's property. He had decided to confess to another Gacaca court and had asked forgiveness of the family and in particular of his wife. He affirmed the group of Hutu men with machetes had been involved in her husband's murder.

There is a palpable sense of excitement in the room; everyone feels this has the ring of truth. But then another community member raises his hand and is recognized.

Community member: I know that the accused did not kill the victim.

Judge: How do you know that? Were you there?

Community member: No I was at a checkpoint up the road. We had been told that the Tutsi were traitors. We were supposed to stop them. The victim was known by neighbors. And people wanted to get information from him. But the accused did not have his machete that day.

Judge: How do you know this?

Community member: We had talked at the check point that day.

Another hand goes up and the person is recognized.

Community member: Could the judge ask this man what time of the day the group of men with machetes surrounded the victim and where on the road that happened?

Judge: Do you know where and when the victim was surrounded? Tell us the time and tell us the exact place.

Community member: I do not know these things. But I am sure the accused did not have his machete then.

A few more questions and the man's statement is torn to shreds.

Soon after the judges begin reading back statements and getting confirmation about precisely what was said. I do not know how this trial concluded but it was fairly obvious whether or not you believed that the accused had been involved in the murder, it was very evident there is a lot of lying going on. Most probably this case was referred back to the formal court system in Rwanda with the recommendation that the courts original finding of the guilt of the accused be sustained.

Amnesty International has been critical of due process issues in the Gacaca system. But I am not sure that western judicial process with all its courtroom games is really any better. I can only report my own experience which was the judicial process, with volunteer judges and without high-powered lawyers, did not seem to get in the way of the truth. It was a breath of fresh air to see people so intimately involved in their own justice system. Of course with high paid lawyers the accused is not allowed to make bald lies or expose themselves as badly as was the case in this instance.

The Gacaca is an indigenous approach which the government used to try over 70,000 people involved in genocidal acts. It was not used for major crimes or for those who instigated and planned the genocide.