

# Trauma and Reconciliation

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## Introduction

I cannot sleep. I see things all the time in front of my eyes – the fighting, blood, the peoples' faces. I am scared. It is this fear that lingers in my head and my mind and I just cannot shake it. The war ended eleven years ago but I am basically still at war.

I have lost eleven family members in the war and I cannot stand or talk to people from the enemy side – I truly and fully hate them. I do not know if I will feel happy again.

I had to learn how to survive and to listen very carefully where the shells are going to land. I needed to fight for water and food on top of trying to stay alive. This state of total tension lasted for four long years and living in fear and rage at the same time destroyed my soul and my heart. I really became like an animal. All of my thinking and reactions were decreased to the simple command – to survive. Finally, when the war was over, I felt so empty, so hollow that I wanted to die. Twelve years after the war I am still trying to find the meaning in life. It is better than in the first years after the war but I am working very hard in trying to stay normal and sane.

These are some of the experiences that I had the privilege to hear as I lead training and teaching sessions on Trauma Awareness and Reconciliation. All of the participants came from countries where violence raged for decades and for many of them the teaching offered a new learning, that their thoughts and reactions that they have expressed above, were normal responses to abnormal situation (STAR Manual, 2002 and Trauma Awareness and Transformation Manual, 2004). All of them were deeply traumatized and needed a safe environment to heal their traumas. For the first time many of them recognized

that they were dealing with traumatic experiences that changed them forever. These experiences made them feel that at that moment they could not live with the enemy, could not talk to the enemy and could only think of getting revenging upon the enemy. The thought of any kind of contact and even possible reconciliation was not possible. There was a complete destruction of human relationship and deep mistrust that was not possible to bridge.

Something needed to happen for the healing and restoration of relationships to take place. What needed to take place was a healing of the human heart, mind and soul of the individuals and groups that survived violent conflict. Healing traumas is in many ways a life-long experience and it is a commitment and matter of personal choice – both for an individual and groups. The decision to heal does not come naturally and it needs to become intentional work for many years and for many generations to come. It is not natural since the natural reaction to the pain and hurt is either to strike back or to flee. In either case the traumatic experience teaches us that we cannot trust those who hurt us and therefore we are on guard and ready to strike back.

In the training and teaching sessions there were the questions: ‘What kind of society do we want to live in?; Where do I want my children to grow up and how do I want my children to grow up?; Do I want to take revenge and hurt the other, even kill the other so that I can live in peace?; Is this going to bring the peace that I am longing for and safety and security as well?’. These questions outlined the reality of the healing process – in order to break the cycle of violence one needs to take a risk and embark on a journey of healing and possible reconciliation. This journey is really a journey that is not straight, it is difficult, painful and hurtful in many ways. It is a journey less traveled and one of the most difficult journeys in life to embark upon. I wrote ‘possible reconciliation’ since many victims do not choose to reconcile but they rather choose the process of healing because they want to get better. Later in the healing journey the thought of possible reconciliation might come up and that leads again into another journey that brings with itself many new and unexpected journeys. This road again is a matter of personal choice and it is a process as well – that might last for a whole life. So, both journeys, the journey

of trauma healing and the journey of reconciliation are separate but also joined; they are matter of personal choice and they are a process. They can be done separately without ever touching one another but then, I dare say, we never fully become healed and reconciled. Both journeys are intertwined.

### **The volcano, destruction and rebirth**

A metaphor that comes to mind when thinking about trauma is a picture of a volcano eruption. Before the eruption, the volcano is working within – the fire is active, lava is hot and it is constantly boiling. There is always a certain kind of volcanic activity present (and this is an active volcano we are talking about) that builds up pressure within. After some time this pressure fills all the space within the volcano and is bursting with the need to ‘spend’ the pressure. After a while this constant level of energy, that cannot be ‘spent’, collects within the volcano, within a closed space, and it starts to build up to the point that it brings an eruption. The eruption of the volcano is very dangerous and destructive – it burns everything on the ground and life is gone. Everything is gray, dark and burnt. The place where lava is present is hot and a lot of poisonous gases are emitted into the air. The place becomes poisonous and death and destruction prevails.

When looking at this picture the first thing that comes to one’s mind is the fact that there will be no life in this place again. Destruction and death prevail. However, after a certain time, the cooled lava and ashes turn into fertile ground that together with rain feed the soil and help to create life again. The seeds of the vegetation that have survived (by some miracle) start to sprout again and bring to life lusher and greener fields and vegetation than before. A place of death and destruction becomes a place of rebirth and life.

Now let’s take this picture closer to ourselves and our life experiences. Many of us had very negative and hurtful traumatic life experiences and many of us found a way to live through these experiences, to survive them and find new meaning in life. After these experiences we have become different people – we had changed forever. We saw life and ourselves in a different light. Like in the volcano’s example, destruction was severe – the hurt and suffering brought excruciating pain. We felt that we would never be able to live again and that

there is no reason to hope and love. However, somewhere deep inside of us, the seeds of life were not destroyed and despite our desire they started pushing us to learn and live again – to hope and love. These seeds helped us to heal and find new meaning in life as well as a new sense of purpose. We rose from the ashes of volcanic activity (from its poisonous gases and destruction) and somehow without our knowing how, hope and love poured the rain of life over us and we rose from the dead – we started to learn how to live again.

The word trauma or traumatic experience is a very loaded word. There are many assumptions about this word – the person is not normal, is crazy, not able to handle the difficulties or not able to get over it. These perceptions create stigma and prejudice for those who are struggling with trauma which in turn helps sufferers to perceive their problems as something abnormal and as personal weakness on their part. However, traumatic experiences have been present in peoples' lives throughout the centuries and are nothing new or unheard of. The usual ways of dealing with the traumatic experience were to not talk about it, deny it and repress it or try to forget about it. This way of dealing with the traumatic experience is common across cultures. Traumatic experiences are ones that individuals or groups have survived and they came as a result of violent conflict, rape, physical violence, sexual violence, refugee life, childhood abuse, natural disasters and other life experiences. A traumatic experience creates traumatic stress that is a surprising event of piercing intensity that is outside the range of usual human experience that would frighten almost everyone (Bartsch, 1996).

Returning to our volcano metaphor, in order to deal and heal our trauma we need to work through our traumatic experience. There are two ways of walking through trauma. The first one is remembering and repeating the story of traumatic experience over and over again in which the pain and suffering are locked and do not have a way of getting out of the person or a groups' body, mind and soul. A person and a group are trapped in this cycle that can go on for a long time and sometimes even forever. In this case the trauma creates negative energy that recycles itself within a person or group in a way that creates an eruption which is violent and destructive. We all know people and groups who have not recovered from the traumatic experience(s) and thus were never able to

get out of this vicious cycle. They got stuck in their pain and there was no way out of it. A violent eruption ended in conflict or war that in turn fed the violence back which would erupt into violence again – and the cycle goes on where we re-traumatize ourselves and thus the violence continues.

A second way of working on traumatic experience calls for healing of trauma in a very holistic way. It calls for healing of our mind, body and soul. This requires serious work and dedication on the part of an individual and a group and it becomes a *personal* choice on an individual and group level to heal the trauma instead of repeating the trauma through generations. This personal decision does not drop out of a clear sky. Instead, it comes through a process of “having enough” of violence and destruction. It comes through the desire to become human again that can live in harmony with ourselves and with others. Once the choice has been made it becomes clear that this will be a long process that can last for years; it is not quick and it does not give fast results. This process can last for twenty, thirty or more years and it requires dedication, commitment, trust and honesty. Above all it requires honesty with oneself and eventually with the other. In this process we are changed and we will never be the same people again. This process also requires practice which means that we continue to practice the process of healing through our lives no matter what life brings along.

Figure one shows the cycle of forgiveness and reconciliation done by Olga Botcharova. It is very helpful to look at this model since it gives us the necessary steps for the process of reconciliation to begin. It is important to understand that this model is not engraved in stone so to speak. It can be expanded, added to – according to our own group or personal experience, according to our own cultural and historical characteristics. What is very useful about this model is that it has two cycles – the first cycle is called Seven Steps to Revenge and the other cycle is called Seven Steps to Forgiveness. It is important to emphasize that trauma healing is both a decision and a process; that trauma healing is not unidirectional and the key is that we have a choice – meaning that we are the ones to decide if we want to heal our trauma and embark on the journey of forgiveness and reconciliation (Good Sider, 2001).

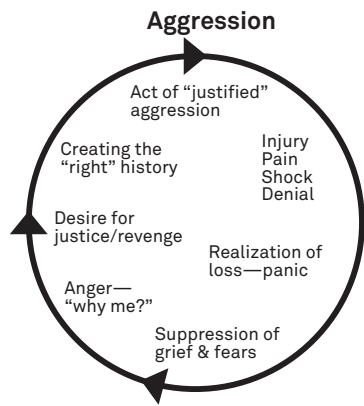


Figure 1: Seven Steps to Revenge – Source: Botcharova (2001)

In the first cycle Botcharova has outlined the seven steps that each of us find in ourselves when we are injured, or if an act of aggression has been done to us.

his inner cycle outlines our human nature – it outlines the way we naturally react when we are threatened and when our and the life of dear ones is at stake. Our natural reaction to an act of aggression is to act defensively in order to protect ourselves. The more dangerous the situation is, the more we are locked in the mode of defensiveness. Logical thinking does not function and what is leading the mode of defense are our instincts – we feel that we are in danger and therefore we need to protect ourselves. Also, the deeper the injury is, the deeper the pain is, and thus we feel very strongly to take revenge and hurt the other back in the same way that we have been hurt by them. In order to be able to hurt the other we dehumanize the other and we create an explanation and a story as to why do we have the right to do an act of aggression to the other, that by this time has become our enemy. Thus, the cycle stays closed because we were hurt and to protect ourselves we hurt the enemy back, who in turn to protect themselves, hurt us and thus the cycle goes on for generations and centuries.

What is important to be understood here, for all of us who have been hurt and suffered major losses and traumas in our lives, is that it is natural to feel injury and pain; it is natural to suppress our losses and fears so that we can survive in the middle of a dangerous situation; it is also natural to feel a desire for justice and revenge; it is also natural to justify revenge to ourselves. When I say natural I mean that this is a very defensive mode of thinking that helped us to survive and be able to continue living. It is natural to feel the above named things and dream of revenge. Many times victims need to go through the cycle over and over again in order to understand what happened to them and why. We all need to tell our stories to ourselves and others many times – in this way we are trying to understand what we have survived, what we have lost. We are trying to make sense of our pain and we are trying to put it in a proper place in our hearts and heads.

The danger of this closed cycle is that one can get stuck in it. A victim can very easily become an aggressor and continue the cycle for generations to come without the possibility of this cycle of ever being broken. We become locked into our own pain and suffering and we are not being able to come out of it. We cannot see anything else but injury and loss. We get stuck in “egoism of victimization” (Mack, 1990). What keeps us in this cycle is our belief that since we have been hurt we have the right to hurt others and thus we create narratives that would help us justify hurting others. In order to be capable of hurting or even killing the other we need to create a good, valid reason for doing this. This is why we create “right conflict narratives” so that we can ease our conscience. We are not able to see beyond our pain, we are not taking responsibility for hurting others and we feel little guilt about committing violence to the other (STAR Manual, 2001).

This is the moment when we lose our humanness and dehumanize ourselves. This is the moment when our trauma, pain and suffering take control over us and when we lose a sense of belonging, self-respect and dignity. This is the moment when we completely stop recognizing the sacredness of our own life. This is when we become a beast and thus an enemy to our enemy who in turn dehumanized us as well. Rafael Moses has described this state in the following words: “Dehumanization, then is a state in which one human being

or group so brutalizes the others that the victim loses self-respect and human dignity. I postulate that the dehumanizer must already have lost the quality of humanness – and, therefore, of self-respect and human dignity. He could not carry dehumanizing acts otherwise... I believe that in the individual must have inter-psyche readiness to be dehumanized in order to dehumanize another; this cannot happen however, unless certain process in the large group (often nation) paves the way for it (Moses, 1990)". So, the cycle is closed and thus the cycle of violence is created.

### **The way out**

However, I believe that humans are created with brains for a reason. We are capable of "higher" thinking – meaning that we are not only bound to be led by our instincts, our fears, and our pain. We have been granted the gift of reason and thinking that has the strength to pull itself up above the pain and suffering and be able to see that inflicting injury and pain unto others is not the solution either. All of us have this powerful gift that helps us to learn that by hurting and killing the other we are destroying ourselves as well. This is when we ask ourselves what kind of life am I creating for myself and the future after me? Many of us learn that by hurting others our pain and trauma are not gone – they are continuing to be present and even deepen. In our minds and hearts we keep the memories of hurting the other and these are not fun pictures. When our conscience starts to bother us and when our heart is calling us to reevaluate the wrongs we have done this is the moment when we are starting to think how to get out of the cycle of violence, how to break this closed circle.

Botcharova offers us the way out – the next step is to one of mourning and expressing of grief. In this moment we acknowledge to ourselves, maybe for the first time, how badly we have been hurt and how much we have suffered. This is the time when we are naming our losses and deeply mourn and grieve for people, life lost, moments and memories. This is a very difficult step to take since it calls us to turn towards ourselves and heal our broken heart and soul. The focus is not on the enemy anymore, the focus is on us and our pain. In this moment we take control over our lives, where trauma and pain do not rule our



life anymore. To take the road of healing is very difficult and it requires courage and strength to carry the process through. During this time we need support, love, and understanding of those who are closest to us. We need people to support us in this process.

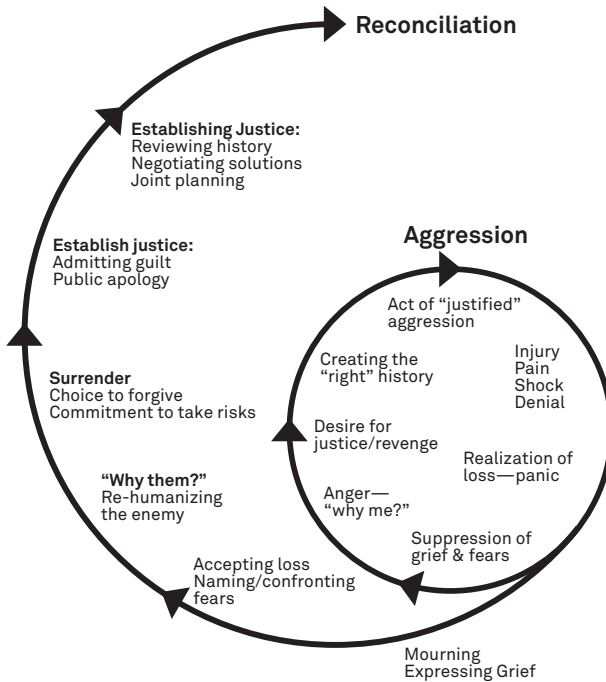


Figure 2: Seven Steps to Forgiveness (Botcharova, 2001)

One of the people, that I have worked, with told me that he chose the role of healing at first because he recognized that he was losing himself in his anger and hatred. His desire for revenge was so strong that it almost destroyed him – this was the only thing he was thinking about. In one sane moment he saw that

he was close to the edge of drowning and loosing his sanity – and getting totally lost in becoming a total beast that was bound only to destroy as many enemies as possible. In this sane moment he had in front of him a picture of what his life will look like and what he saw was total destruction of his soul and heart, an utter loneliness and separation from everything that is life-giving and joyful. In this moment (he could not even explain what gave him the strength) he walked away from the abyss of self destruction and decided to mourn what he has lost. He took the step out of cycle of violence. His explanation was that he did not want to destroy himself – he said that hatred was an acid that was eating his soul piece by piece until the moment that he could become “soul-less” – the man without a soul.

Many times when we take this step we do not think about how we want to reconcile with the enemy at some point in the future. The only thing that we think is that we want to save ourselves, as in this example. This journey, in many ways, is a spiritual one – the moment when we are restoring our soul, our own humanity. During this time we are learning about ourselves in a totally new way. We are learning who we have become in the worst moment of our lives. This is the moment when we meet our suffering and pain fully and meet with our trauma for the first time. Facing oneself with this is not fun and it takes a lot of courage to be present with ourselves. This is when we learn how to forgive ourselves and how to help ourselves heal. This is when we learn how to be compassionate to ourselves as well. We are starting to develop the discipline of forgiveness and reconciliation with ourselves.

### **The cycle of victim and perpetrator**

This chart very clearly outlines how each side – the victim and the perpetrator can get stuck in their cycles and also how each of them can become a victim or perpetrator. This chart has been helpful for me to understand how people are capable of committing such horrors and are still able to continue believing that what they have done essentially has been for the best of them as an individual or as a group. This chart also helped me in better understanding how somebody can become a perpetrator and that there is potential in each one of us to

become one. The danger is when we are not aware of this potential and let life circumstances make decisions for us. The cycle of the victim and perpetrator is simplified here, even though it is complex in itself in this chart. There are numerous other factors that contribute to our being stuck in one cycle or the other or in both (moving from one to the other at different times in life). Some of the factors are our family upbringing (what stories we have been told about the other – about the enemy), our social context where we group up, our belief system, our emotional and spiritual self-awareness, development and maturity.

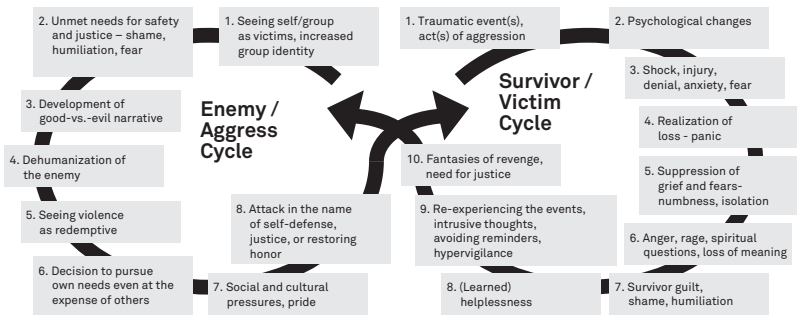


Figure 3: Enemy/Aggressor & Survivor/Victim Cycle (Yoder, 2005)

## The acceptance of traumatic experience

Accepting the traumatic experience does not mean that we are forgetting it. It is the acknowledgment of its existence and horridness that we cannot forget – and we should not forget, but what we are doing in this process is choosing how are we going to remember it and what are we going to do with this life experiences. Many people have the notion that if we accept and make peace with the traumatic experience that we decided to forget. We can only forget our trauma if we get amnesia – which happens to some victims since traumatic experience has been so horrific that in order to survive, the brain totally shuts down and victims do not remember at all their trauma and are not able to talk about it. It takes a lot of work and time with victims to be able to recall the

experience without going crazy. However, most of us remember what happened to us and the memory of it is not going to disappear, but our thinking about it and understanding of it will change.

The decision of what do we want to do with our traumatic experience is an important one – we make the decision to put it in the proper place in our heart and head and accept it as other life experiences. Once this is done we have to decide what to do with the knowledge that we have acquired – the experience and the unbelievable resilience of heart, mind and spirit. I deeply believe that we have the responsibility to share this knowledge with others – to help them in their healing process. The other reason why we need to share this knowledge with others is that we have succeeded to get out of the cycle of victim, we have survived our trauma and are now thriving. We have become wounded healers – the wounded healers of others. Wounded healers are those people who find new ‘meaning in their life, purpose and faith in or through traumatic experience. They take care of themselves and allow themselves to be taken care of. As a wounded healer we carry our wounds with us but do not inflict them on others. Rather we use them to help carry the burdens of others and enable them to heal’ (Bartsch, 1996).

Each time we help others in their healing process we consequently help ourselves – we heal our trauma even more and deeper. The natural question that comes up is “Do we get healed from our traumas?” I believe we do. When we are healed “once and for all” it is the moment when we become truly aware of suffering of others to the point that we feel moved to help. This is when we are able to bring ourselves to rise above our pain and suffering and be there for others. The moment when we fully realize and feel the suffering of others is the sacred moment in a person’s life. This moment is sacred for the precise reason of teaching us how to become more compassionate, loving and caring towards others. We move spiritually into very deep levels of our soul and learn how precious and sacred life is and how each (but really each) person has the right to live this life in peace. This is a deep spiritual change that makes better people of us – some of us for the first time learn what it means to truly love and care for the other even if we do not know the other.

The healing that has taken place does not happen only on a psychological level, but on a biological and spiritual level as well. The process of healing does not mean that we heal only our heart and mind but we need to heal our souls as well. All three areas need to embark on the journey of healing in order for a person to be healed. It is not possible to heal one area without the other two and achieve the complete healing. This is why the healing journey is very difficult and sometimes is a life-long commitment and process. In this process support of family and friends is essential as well as peoples' faith in God, or for those who do not believe in God, belief in love, or a better tomorrow, better something that gives hope and meaning. All of us believe in something and all of us deeply believe that we all deserve to live in peace. Traumatic experience at first becomes the curse but after the healing takes place it becomes a gift that teaches us how to live our life, how to love and care for others – even for our enemies. Once we come to this stage in our healing process we have gone full-circle. We have been *victimized* and after telling our stories we have moved to become *survivors* that are integrating our trauma into our life where we have acquired the knowledge and are embarking into the stage of *wounded healer* (Bartsch, 1996)". This is the moment when we have empowered ourselves and have taken control over our life and our traumatic experience. We have taken the power away from the perpetrator the moment when we have decided to heal our trauma regardless of the presence or absence of the perpetrator's apology. This is the moment when we have come out of the cycle of victim and are ready to ask ourselves the question "What next?".

### **Reconciliation – are you crazy?**

If we are about to create the truly full and honest reconciliation with others we need to address and work on trauma and reconciliation, separately and together at the same time. This is a paradox but as any paradox can be explained and justified to a certain extent and on the other extent it cannot be explained and justified. It can be justified from the prospective that if we would like to live in a peaceful society we do need to address and work on our traumas and move in the direction of reconciliation. This is easier said than done since most people

assume that working on trauma and reconciliation means sugar-coating the pain and suffering, bypassing the truth, being nice to each other and pretending as if nothing happened. In this case both sides end up being very civil and pleasant with one another and they continue to live side by side but not with each other – not together. We basically end up in the corner where, yes we know what the other side did to us or our group throughout the centuries, and yes we will never forget and as soon as we sense the possible danger we are all up and in arms (verbally and literally) defending ourselves and everything that is dear to us.

From the above perspective, the paradox of trauma and reconciliation cannot be justified since the possibility of loss and suffering is huge and it is only normal to defend oneself. I believe that Archbishop Tutu put it right “Reconciliation is not about being cozy; it is not about pretending that things were other than they were. Reconciliation based on falsehood, on not facing up to reality, is not true reconciliation and will not last (Chapman, 2001).” Reconciliation is a very loaded word. Many people will also say that reconciliation is not possible for the precise reasons of not being genuine, truthful and honest. There are many examples in the world between nations and people that worked on reconciliation and ended up in even deeper conflict. However, no matter how deep the conflicts are, deep down everybody would like to live, to see the day, to witness perfect reconciliation – the perfect moment of forgiveness and truth, the perfect moment of healing. We all ache in our bones for this moment to come and we are imagining that this perfect reconciliation is possible and real. We continue to believe in it despite the reality around us. There is something within us that forces us to believe it is possible to live life in the perfect peace, where the sheep and the wolf are lying together.

In order to achieve the perfect reconciliation that creates perfect peace, we need to practice. I have come to understand that reconciliation is not going to come by itself; it cannot be created out of thin air and out of nothing. For reconciliation to exist and become a real presence, a force that changes the order of the universe, it needs to be practiced, i.e. it needs to become reality. When I say practiced I mean that we need to learn how to do reconciliation. This means that we need to practice over and over again how to reconcile with ourselves

and others in order to carry the reconciliation through – until the end. To become “masters” of reconciliation we need to teach ourselves to be disciplined in this skill. I have learned (and I am continuing to learn) that this skill needs to be practiced on an ongoing basis. At first it is strange and unbelievable, and frightening as well. It requires us to hear the other, hear their pain and suffering, recognize the human in the other. This pushes us to start to see things in a different light, start to see the situation from the other’s perspective. This is when we start to develop a relationship, become connected with the other – our enemy. This is the time when we humanize our enemy and ourselves.

By recognizing that our enemy after all is a human being that deeply suffers and feels the pain and hurt as we do, we recognize the human in the enemy. Through this process we regain our own humanness back – we recognize the human in ourselves. The very moment when this recognition happens both, enemy and us, become human beings again. We gain this self-respect and dignity that both of us have lost. We are restored to the human family and in a very paradoxical way we have opened ourselves to another level of healing. The tricky thing here is that many of us believe that our enemies only become beasts – but not us. However, in every violent conflict from the moment when we are forced to think about hurting or killing other this is precise moment when we lose our humanness and dehumanize ourselves. So, having the strength for the first time to look the enemy in the eye forces us in many ways to look at ourselves – at our own responsibility, our own actions, prejudice and wrongs.

### **The deeper we go the messier it gets**

This is the process when we take responsibility for what we have done to the other and the other takes responsibility for the wrongs done to us. We both end up owning the wrongs, naming them, and apologizing. This is the moment when both sides start to develop trust towards the other – that the same pain and suffering would not be done unto us again, that history will not repeat itself. Also, this is when we recognize that we are not going to harm the other either. This is the place where we start to think about the future together with the enemy that in the process has ceased to be the enemy anymore. The person

or the group has ceased to be the enemy but it does not mean that has become our friend. This does not need to happen. What does need to happen is respect for the other (former enemy) that comes from deep within. With this respect we acknowledge that the other has right to live the life and when we fully recognizes the sacredness of the life in the other at the same time we recognize the same within ourselves. This is the moment of opening the door for making the peace with the other.

At some point in this healing journey, when we have healed enough and are able to look beyond ourselves and our pain, we start to notice our enemy. For the first time in our life we might be noticing that this enemy is suffering and hurting too. We are able to see this in our enemy because we were able to see our own pain and hurt. This is when we are able to feel compassion for the other. In this moment our enemy became human again – it is not a beast anymore.

All of these processes are very slow and gradual. Nothing happens all at once and sometimes it takes many years and decades to rebuild the human in ourselves and in the other. We literally rise up from the ashes. During this time we became capable of hearing the enemy's story. This is the moment when we embark on the road of forgiveness and maybe realize that we would like to reconcile with the enemy. Forgiveness in this moment represents a time in the journey when trauma does not have control over the victim's and offender's lives. Forgiveness is rarely a one-time event and it takes years to be completed. Both victims and offenders go through and revisit forgiveness in various ways at different times in their lives. This process is very dynamic and is always changing (Schmidt, 1995).

There are myths about forgiveness where for many people forgiving means forgetting; to forgive means to accept the offense; forgiveness is automatic; forgiving is a quick, one-time event and to forgive means the relationship is reconciled (Miller, 2000). Forgiveness is not something that can be forced or pushed. Forgiveness comes deep within us when we are ready to forgive. When we are forgiving we are ... acknowledging that remembering is essential for forgiveness; we are acknowledging that naming the abuse as wrong and



unacceptable is essential to forgiveness; we are acknowledging that anger, hatred and bitterness follow naturally from the abuse of power; we are acknowledging that forgiveness is a process and we acknowledge the distinction between forgiveness and reconciliation (Miller, 2000).

Distinction between forgiveness and reconciliation is that forgiveness is not conditional, it comes in at its own pace. This means that we forgive when we *desire* to forgive, not when somebody tells us to do so. The readiness to forgive happens when we have healed enough within ourselves so that our pain and suffering are not blocking our ability to see the life around us in a new light. In this moment our heart has caught up with our head – this means that heart and head are now walking at the same pace and they are not at odds with each other. The head is able to understand the heart and the heart is able to understand the head. Maybe for the first time in our healing process we are becoming a complete person. Trauma has the ability to split a person in half where one part of us wants to live a normal life and forget that we ever had any kind of traumatic event that took place in our lives. The other part of us just cannot get over what happened to us. If we do not work intentionally on healing our own trauma(s) these two states within ourselves will always be at war and will not bring peace to us that our soul is so much longing for. With the choice to heal our traumas we arrive to the stage in this process where head and heart are able to meet each other and accept each other as changed due to the experience that has taken place. We have become a new person and are able to accept our changed selves.

It was very helpful to read what Ron Kraybill has written on the topic of healing in his article “From Head to Heart: The Cycle of Reconciliation.” In his article he says:

People in conflict frequently wage an internal battle between head and heart. By “head” I mean their values and conscience; by “heart” I mean their emotions. People think they ought to be reconciled with others, but their hearts are not ready. Bystanders often ignore this internal split or do things that make it worse. Religious settings are especially hazardous. Well-meaning friends, pastors, even mediators respond in ways that strengthen

the “head” message, but ignore or disparage the cries of the heart... The key to enabling heart reconciliation is the knowledge that it is a process with a rhythm and dynamic of its own. To the brain’s concern with what ought to be, the heart responds with what is. The head functions like light in space – touch a switch and it’s there. The heart functions like a radiator heating a room – it takes time to get the job done. The head can set direction for the heart, but the heart must arrive at its own pace... True healing involves a unity of head and heart (Kraybill, 1988)

Is the process of healing done once we have forgiven those who have hurt us? Is the process done once the both sides have acknowledged the wrongdoings to each other? No, the process is not over and it continues. The other big word that both sides need to deal with is the question of justice. What kind of justice needs to happen to satisfy my need for right punishment? Is it jail time for those who hurt me, is it death of those who hurt me? Very often when we think of justice after the terrible trauma that we have survived we often think of all possible ways in which we could punish the other. The justice that we imagine is severe punishment (sometimes only the death of the perpetrator would be a just punishment) through which we would empty all our pain, hatred, anger and deep-down hurt. We would pour out all the poison that we have accumulated over the years of suffering. This just punishment would free us from all the hurt and we would be clean and empty from all the poison. We would be able to continue our life normally and we will be restored.

I would argue that restoration would not be complete; that it would not be a healing one and that we would be left with wounds that would every now and then open and cause pain. Why? Because we have not forgiven, we have not let go of trauma and we have not integrated the trauma into our life experience. We are still in the stage of mourning our losses and grieving. The moment we decide to forgive is the moment we have started to ask for a different kind of justice – not a retributive but a restorative one. The justice that we are asking for is asking from the perpetrator to take full responsibility for the wrongdoings and to become very active in righting the wrongs – together with the victim. This justice requires a full look at the past and what has taken place. It requires

facing up to the reality of the past to the full extent. There is no room for negotiation here and minimizing of the wrongs. This process calls for full openness and vulnerability in admitting the wrongs and changing the present and the future.

### **Righting the wrongs**

The traumatic event that we have survived forced us to see what is important in life. It forced us to see what the present and the future could look like and what is important to happen so that we can live peacefully with the other. The moment we recognize how big a price we (as an individual or group) have been paying for generations and how high the costs are, we realize that this is what the future will look like for those who come after us – our children. In order to change the present and the future we decide to call for truthful reexamination of the past and we are ready to face not only the perpetrators' responsibility but also our own in allowing violence or conflict to be passed from generation to generation.

This is the moment when we choose for justice not to be based on revenge and retribution. Instead justice becomes based on forgiveness and restoration (Ellis, 2001). The restorative justice that we seek becomes concerned for the victim and offender; it becomes concerned for the whole community; it addresses harms and root causes; it addresses victims' needs and perpetrators' responsibility for repairing the harm; it promotes healing and it restores the community (Heart, 2004 and Mike and Zehr, 2000). Restorative justice restores our souls, both the victim's and the perpetrator's. The healing happens to both in different and similar ways.

Restoration happens when we walk through the history of violence or conflict that connects both sides step by step. In this process we look at the stories that we have been told differently – maybe for the first time. We recognize what have we been told by our parents and grandparents; how much we have been raised with fear, mistrust and animosity towards the other. This is when we hear the narratives that we have been raised on in different light. In this process we might for the first time realize how much the story that we have

been told is not that simple. How there is no black and white picture. Instead there are many shades of gray where both sides have contributed to the violence and have helped in continuing it.

The “Integrated Framework for Peacebuilding” (figure four) by Lisa Schirch has been very helpful for me in understanding the need to address past, present and the future in the process of peacebuilding. In my understanding, working on peacebuilding requires working on trauma and reconciliation and this figure helped me to map the timeframe for the process of trauma healing and reconciliation.

### Integared Framework for Peacebuilding

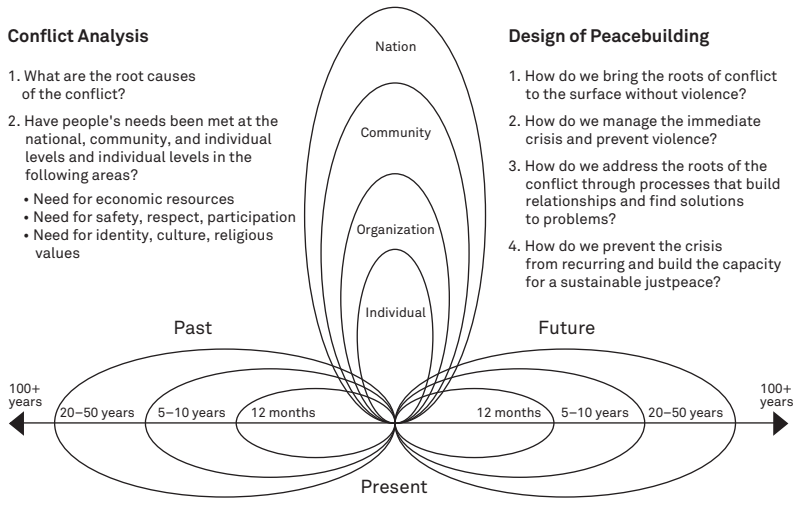


Figure 4: Integrated Framework for Peacebuilding (Schirch, 2002)

The figure was helpful since it displayed the picture of how deep we need to go when we are working on reconciliation. The figure also tell us that we need to roll up our sleeves get to the serious work that requires work on all levels

– work on individual, organizational, communal and national level. It tell us that between the parties in conflict working on one level, without addressing the other levels that have been impacted by the conflict, will not bring truthful examination of the past and present. Thus the future created will not carry in itself a long-term peace. The important questions that need to be addressed here are: what are the causes of the conflict? Have people’s needs been met at the national, community, and individual levels in the following areas: need for economic resources, need for safety, respect and participation and need for identity, culture and religious values? (Schirch, 2002).

We might be looking at the period in history of five to ten years or we might be looking at the period in history that is twenty years old or even more than a hundred years old. This figure taught me a good lesson – two people or groups in conflict might look at the past, present and the future from different angles or better to say from different time periods. What I might see as the beginning of my history of suffering and pain for the other might be only in the middle of their story or history of suffering and pain or not even present in their story. This is very important to name since it tells us that we have different points of reference when we talk about history, about who did what, who committed which atrocities and so forth. I call this “needs reality” – since each individual and group carry their wounds, pain and suffering from different times and have a need for these pains and suffering to be addressed by the perpetrator and taken responsibility for (Puljek-Shank, 2003). This figure teaches us to tread very cautiously and seriously in the process of reconciliation.

This walk through history requires reexamining the battles won at the expense of the other that we celebrate (chosen glories) and the traumas that we mourn from generation to generation and are not able to let go of (chosen traumas), (STAR Manual, 2001). In this process, both sides learn that victories have been won at the expense of others and that what one groups celebrates is a tragedy for the other. We also learn that our stories are coming from long ago (some of them are many centuries old) and that precisely because of our inability to mourn our losses and grieve, we have prevented healing. Walking through history is a very painful process that leads us into an unknown

direction. In this process we are establishing truthful narratives (by working together with the other). These truthful narratives reflect the reality and understanding of what happened from both sides.

Reconciliation entails

an honest acknowledgment of the harm/injury each party has inflicted on the other; sincere regrets and remorse for the injury done, readiness to apologize for one's role in inflicting the injury; readiness of the conflicting parties to 'let go' of the anger and bitterness caused by the conflict and the injury; commitment by the offender not to repeat the injury; sincere effort to redress past grievances that caused the conflict and compensate the damage caused to the extent possible; entering into a new mutually enriching relationship; the sense of justice changes over time, and such change is necessary to engage in the reconciliation process; reconciliation as a gradual, slow, and complex process. (Assefa, and Abu-Nimer, Abdul Aziz Said and Lakshitha S. Prelis)

Reconciliation requires a commitment: there is no turning back once the commitment is made. The road is not straight. It is very bumpy and at times dangerous. There are no easy ways out and we are recommitting ourselves to the process throughout our life. Even though we have opened ourselves to the healing of our trauma and we might even heal we still continue to live life. Life in itself is not static. It is very dynamic, ever-changing and full of positive and negative surprises. In life we will probably encounter again the time when we will need to heal and work on forgiveness and reconciliation. However, it will not be the first time. It will be the second, third, fourth, fifth and so on. The more we practice, the better we get in our practice. There will be a time when we will be hurt again and we will find ourselves again within the inner cycle of revenge. It is natural to find ourselves here – again. After all it is human to feel pain and hurt. It is also human to desire protection and revenge for inflicted pain. But the difference is that in our hearts and head we have made a commitment to the process of forgiveness and reconciliation. This means that after we spend some time in this inner cycle we are able to get out of it quicker than the first or second time and that we are able to name our

losses and mourn them. We will be able to recognize how we feel and why. We will also know why we want to heal again. We have made a commitment to ourselves that life is sacred, that we do not want to end up hating and hurting, that we want to live and nurture and that we want to love and hope. When we acknowledge this commitment it means that we have chosen to practice on an ongoing basis the important skill – the skill of reconciliation.

I would reflect that this chapter is a short summary of the process of trauma healing and reconciliation. Both of these topics have many subtopics and would require more space to be explained in detail. Both topics are very complex and difficult to work on and my hope is that reading of this chapter will provide helpful insights and questions for the reader. I would finish with the quote that has many times strengthened me in my healing and reconciliation process – ‘If we are not able to say good by we are not able to say hello again’.

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