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From Tel Aviv to Ulcinj

Can we learn from each other about reconciliation and peace-building?

In 2000, the Serbian journal *Rec* together with radio B92 published a booklet under the title "Truths, Responsibilities, Reconciliations: The Example of Serbia". The issues cited in the title emerge as keypoints towards building democracy in a society ravaged by long years of war. The Israeli sociologist Arie Nadler draws parallels between the former Yugoslavia and the Middle East and sees that responsibility, reconciliation and the search for truth are not such different issues when applied to different regions and peoples.

In mid-March 2000, I attended a meeting in Ulcinj, Montenegro, that was devoted to discussing "Truth", "Responsibility" and "Reconciliation" in the context of the conflict in the former Yugoslavia. I was fortunate to be invited to contribute with the view of a social psychologist from Tel Aviv University. Two months have passed since the end of the meeting and it is now clear to me that the tiring trip from Tel Aviv to Budapest to Podgorica to Ulcinj was worth the effort. The meeting sharpened the fact that the dilemmas that are subsumed under the three words, "truth," "responsibility," and "reconciliation" transcend across regions and peoples. Although history, culture and geo-political conditions in the Middle East are very different from those in Serbia, Kosovo or Montenegro, Israelis and Palestinians face the same dilemmas as do Serbs, Montenegrins or Albanians as they move along the arduous road from conflict to peaceful co-existence. This is the road that I propose to cover in this article.

This road from conflict resolution to reconciliation is a relatively uncharted course in the social sciences. We know a fair amount about negotiations and conflict resolution, but we seem to know next to nothing about reconciliation and peace building. The reason for this relative neglect seems rooted in our conception of "conflict resolution." The social sciences have developed a "rational" model of conflict and its resolution. In economics, political science, sociology and social psychology, conflict is viewed as emanating from actors' disagreements on how to divide valued resources between themselves. In line with this, much of the negotiation and conflict resolution literature tells us that parties solve their conflicts once they discover a rational formula to divide the contested resources between them. These resources may be land, water or financial resources, but once consensually divided, conflict ends and peace reigns.

Yet, the discussions in Ulcinj served to remind me, and all present, that conflicts between nations and groups involve issues that are beyond the rational, cold calculus of interests and resources. When nations, tribes or even families have been in conflict for many years, they become suspicious of each other's intentions, feel victimised by the other and have discrepant versions of

the history of the conflict. Each side views the other as responsible for past atrocities. It is therefore always the other's responsibility to apologise and initiate the process of reconciliation. These perceptions and feelings contribute to the perpetuation of the conflict and do not disappear once leaders have put their signatures on peace agreements. In Ireland, South Africa, the Middle East and the Balkans, we are all learning that the task of building co-existence and a reality of peace between former enemies begins only after the celebration of signing peace is over.

In this article I aim to use peace-building experiences between Israelis and Palestinians in the Middle East to consider broader issues of reconciliation and peace building. The article is based on the talk I had prepared to be delivered in Ulcinj, together with my thoughts as I was listening to the deliberations in the Ulcinj conference.

The TRC Process in South Africa: The King's Need for Reconciliation?

How can nations and groups embark on the road towards reconciliation? One answer is suggested by the Truth and Reconciliation Committee (TRC) process in South Africa. This has been a momentous, bold and unprecedented process of reconciliation. It was built on the premise that adversaries can get over the pain of the past if a procedure is created where the "truth" of the tormentors is told voluntarily by them to their victims who reciprocate by granting forgiveness to their former tormentors. This idea has ignited the imagination of people of good will everywhere. They have embraced the notion of the TRC process and suggested to apply it to the Middle East, the Balkans, and elsewhere. Comments in the same spirit were very common during the Ulcinj meeting.

Although one cannot but respect the courage, wisdom and humanity that guided Nelson Mandela, Desmond Tutu, William de Klerk and others who designed and implemented the TRC process, the calls for its implementation in other conflict areas may be premature. The real question is not how to apply 'TRC-like processes' to other conflict areas, but when will such processes "work," and when will they backfire.

Before examining this question I want to address the sources of attraction that the TRC processes has for us all. It seems to me that this attraction is at least partly explicable by the role that concepts such as "confession and "forgiveness" play in Western culture. These concepts resonate with familiar themes in Western cultures. They are consistent with the religious maxim that "confession" leads to "absolution" and "forgiveness." This notion is especially salient in the Catholic faith, but is also present in other major religions. Also, the basic ideas of the TRC process are congruent with the 20th-century culture of psychotherapy that tells us that "talking heals the tormented soul," and that the key to a happy future lies in our ability to rid ourselves of the demons of the past. A hundred years have passed since Freud's publication of "The Interpretation of Dreams" in 1900. During this time, the idea that people can free themselves from the burdens of the uneasy past by examining and re-experiencing it has taken root in Western culture. Thus, the concepts upon which the TRC procedures rest are well ingrained in our culture. We "know" that telling the truth is a prerequisite for absolution and "setting things right again" and therefore we embrace the TRC process as the king's road to reconciliation.

But, is it indeed so? Does the social malady of conflict have a single all-embracing cure: confession and forgiveness? I suggest that the answer to this question is negative. These processes promote reconciliation only under certain conditions. I want to examine these conditions now.

Two Types of Conflict, Two Contexts of Resolution and Two Goals of Reconciliation: South Africa and the Middle East

To consider the optimal route towards reconciliation and peace-building one needs to first distinguish between (a) *types of conflict*, (b) *circumstances of conflict resolution*, and (c) *the goals of reconciliation*. For the sake of clarity of my presentation, I propose to consider these different parameters by referring to two conflicts that have begun to move towards their resolution in the last decade of the 20th century and that are well known to every consumer of written and televised world news: the racial conflict in South Africa and the Palestinian–Israeli conflict in the Middle East.

The South African example represents a case where *two communities within the same nation* were in adversarial relations. The white South Africans dominated the black South Africans and created the Apartheid regime to preserve their dominance. This was the background for *intra-societal* conflict, and its resolution occurred only when the prevailing Apartheid regime was abolished and replaced by a democratic system. The purpose of *reconciliation* in this conflict was *social integration*: white and black South Africans realised that the existence of South Africa is predicated on the ability of the former foes within the country to find a common ground that will enable them to live together. To accomplish this goal, all social energies were harnessed to facilitate a future in which both past tormentors and past victims would be included in the same South Africa. Steps like TRC processes are taken to heal a torn society and the hope is that through such actions the fragments may become one whole again. This is an *inclusive reconciliation*. The goal of reconciliation is to include past adversaries in the same nation.

This is very different from the realities of conflict, conflict resolution and reconciliation in the Middle East. For the last 100 years the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians has been *between two nations* that are struggling for the same piece of land. The kind of *conflict resolution* has been radically different from that in South Africa. In the Middle East, conflict resolution does not mean the replacement of one "evil" system with a more benevolent system, as was the case in South Africa. Rather, resolution began when the two adversaries have decided to co-exist next to each other. Therefore, the goal of reconciliation in the Israeli–Palestinian case is very different from the South African case. The Israelis and Palestinians *do not have an integrative goal*. In fact, theirs is a goal of autonomous, mutually accepting co-existence. The emphasis is *not on integration* but on *separation, independence and co-existence*. Because of the geo-political realities in the Middle East, such separation must take place within the framework of regional co-operation, but the emphasis is on two independent and separate national entities rather than on integration within the same national boundaries.

The South African example represents many similar *intra-societal* conflicts that have been resolved by the replacement of one oppressive "evil system" with a more benevolent and open system. In this sense it is similar to conflicts in Chile, Guatemala or in the societies in the former Communist bloc that need to deal with a past of Communist oppression in order to become whole and integrated again. The Israeli–Palestinian case is an example for many

inter-national conflicts, where there is a need to forge a new reality that is made up of co-operation and co-existence between *separate* and *equal* national entities. Where do Serbia, Montenegro, or Kosovo fall in these two models? Is their case similar to that of Israelis and Palestinians or that of black and white South Africans? Is the goal of reconciliation in the Balkans separation or integration? This is a question that only these people themselves can answer. But, being aware of the question and alternative answers is a prerequisite to more reasoned thinking and action in this context.

Two Routes to Reconciliation: Socio-Emotional and Instrumental Reconciliation

This analysis of two types of conflict suggests that the goals of reconciliation change from one set of circumstances to another. Efforts in the era of post-conflict may be directed at achieving integration between past enemies and healing past wounds. Alternatively, these efforts may be focused on achieving a stable co-existence between former adversaries. These two distinct goals suggest two separate routes to reconciliation. One is *socio-emotional reconciliation* and is better suited to achieve the goal of *social integration*, and the second is *instrumental reconciliation* and is better suited to achieving the goal of *separate co-existence*. In the next paragraphs I shall elaborate on each of these two routes to reconciliation.

(a) Socio-emotional reconciliation

Socio-emotional reconciliation aims at dealing, in a constructive manner, with the conflict-related emotions that block the road to social integration. Chief among these emotional blocks is the need for revenge. When conflict ends, the victimised party is likely to be preoccupied with the need to seek revenge against its former tormentor. A full discussion of revenge is beyond the scope of the present paper. Yet, one relevant feature of this intense human emotion is its cyclical nature. When the victims take revenge of their tormentors, they become the new tormentors. The new victim, the former tormentor, is now preoccupied with his or her own quest for revenge. Put differently, the never-ending cycle of revenge is the best antidote to reconciliation.

It has been suggested that one major psychological function of revenge is to restore to the helpless victim his or her sense of control and empowerment. The truth and reconciliation processes in South Africa seem to have done exactly that. When the white policeman of the Apartheid regime admitted guilt and blame over past wrongdoings, the power relations between him, the former tormentor, and his black victim were reversed. From the former situation where the helpless black victim was at the mercy of his or her white tormentor, the TRC created a situation in which the power to forgive or withhold forgiveness for past wrong-doings was in the hands of the former victims. It seems that if being victimised means being helpless, being able to grant or withhold forgiveness allows the victim to regain pride, strength and self-respect. This seems to me to be one of the key elements of the success of the TRC process in South Africa. Through confession by the tormentors and the granting of forgiveness by the victims, the two parties are phenomenologically more equal to each other, and thereby more likely to pursue a common future in the society of which they are integral parts.

Socio-emotional reconciliation processes are supposed to produce a *psychological revolution* in the "collective psyche" of the two parties. There is an implicit assumption about an almost instantaneous emotional healing that results from the candid telling of the truth by the wrongdoer and genuine

forgiving by the victim. The basic idea in socio–emotional reconciliation is that the past is the key to the future. Dealing with the past by confessing to crimes and granting forgiveness transforms the present and enables a better future.

In sum, *socio–emotional* reconciliation is a "social dance," in that it is made up of two complementary "steps": (a) admission of guilt and apology by the perpetrator, and (b) granting of forgiveness by the victim. For this "social dance" to lead to reconciliation, two conditions must be met. *First*, there has to be a consensus on who is the victim and who is the perpetrator. *Second*, there needs to be enough trust between the parties to ensure that the wrongdoer who confesses will be absolved and forgiven. If either one of these conditions is missing, socio–emotional reconciliation is not likely to 'work'. These two conditions exist when the conflict ends with the victim group emerging as clearly victorious. This was the situation in South Africa and it allowed the TRC process to proceed successfully. With the exception of extreme cases, like that of Nazi Germany, international conflicts do not end with one side completely vanquished and consensually labelled as the "criminal tormentor," while the other is fully vindicated and consensually labelled as the innocent victim. More commonly, the two sides in such conflicts decide to replace conflict with co–existence. In this case, there is no clear–cut consensual agreement on who is the victim and who is the tormentor. Thus, for example, in the Middle East both parties feel that they are the legitimate victims, whereas the other side is seen as the cruel perpetrator of past atrocities. Under these conditions, socio–emotional reconciliation may do more harm than good. Truth–telling is likely to turn into a reciprocal cycle of accusations, reinforce stereotypes and deepen mistrust, rather than result in forgiveness. In this case, reconciliation is predicated not on discovering a single and ultimate truth, but on the realisation that each of the parties has its own truth. Accepting the other's legitimate victimhood and admitting one's own wrongdoing is particularly difficult in this case where truth is multi–faceted and where angelic or satanic deeds are not neatly placed on either side of the fence. To accept the other's pains, and one's responsibility for causing them, requires empathy and trust that simply does not exist between the two former enemies who are preoccupied with their own pains and victimisation as they close the door on the conflictual past.

The goal of reconciliation efforts in this case are to secure an environment that enables separate co–existence through the *gradual and slow building of trust*. This will lay the ground for the parties to later cautiously address the thorny issues that socio–emotional reconciliation deals with: victimhood, blame, forgiveness and divergent versions of history. To arrive at this stage the two parties must first learn to coexist and respect the integrity of the other. To accomplish this, slow processes of *instrumental reconciliation* need to be put into motion.

(b) Instrumental Reconciliation: The Evolutionary Process of Peace–Building

In contrast to socio–emotional reconciliation, instrumental reconciliation is a long process of peace building and is made up of countless projects in which the former adversaries learn to co–operate with each other as equals. Put differently, socio–emotional reconciliation aims at creating psychological changes that will subsequently produce changes on the ground, whereas instrumental reconciliation suggests that the gradual accumulation of many changes on the ground will result in subsequent psychological change.

When two sides have successfully negotiated an end to hostilities, they have agreed about things that divided them in the past. These *divisive issues* are usually disagreements about tangible resources such as contested land or reservoirs of water. Once the parties have found a way to allocate these contested resources in a manner they view as being reasonably satisfactory and fair, they put their signatures to a peace agreement. Then, and only then, comes the task of working together to secure the things that will unite them in the future. These "*unifying issues*" need to be *equally important* to both parties who must co-operate to achieve them. Clean air is a good example. The air that Palestinians and Israelis, or Serbs and Croats breathe does not know borders or checkpoints. If the air in the Middle East or in former Yugoslavia is to be kept unpolluted, former enemies must co-operate to make it so. The same is true for preservation of wildlife in the region, or for securing regional economic growth. While moving beyond war involves dividing things that *separated the parties in the past*, building peace consists of co-operating to secure the things that will *unite the former adversaries in the future*.

The importance of this was recognised by the architects of the peace process in the Middle East. Following the Madrid Conference in 1991, the architects of the Arab-Israeli peace process designed the multi-party track of negotiations between Arabs and Israelis. In it the former enemies were to discuss ways to promote *regional* welfare by discussing issues such as the quality of air and water in the region. The logic was that repeated experiences of working toward common goals would highlight the common fate of the former adversaries in the region where they live.

The "Peace-Building Paradox": Equal Co-operation between Unequal Partners

The importance of co-operating to achieve *common goals* as the king's road to the building of trust and reduction of animosity between adversaries is echoed in social psychological research and theory. Yet, this research tells us that such co-operative ventures increase trust only when the two parties co-operate as *equals* to achieve a *common goal*. But this emphasis on equality underscores a major difficulty in the process of instrumental reconciliation. Rarely, if ever, are the relations between former enemies characterised by equality. Usually one side is more powerful and more advanced than the other. Under such conditions, what is co-operation to one side is likely to be viewed as degrading dependency by the other, less advantaged party.

This reality of inequality and the difficulties which it poses for instrumental reconciliation is most evident in the Middle East where Israel is perceived as being technologically and economically more powerful than its Arab neighbours. These are not only perceptions. GNP figures and other economic indices tell the same story. But, although this more advanced Israeli economy and technology can be viewed as a resource that the whole region could benefit from, it is perceived as representing the danger of Israeli economic domination, a danger which should be avoided at all costs. This was aptly put by an Egyptian colleague who once said: "We Arabs need a technological October war before we can truly make peace with you." This is no mere remark. All those who try to advance co-operation between Israelis and Arabs in economic, cultural and scientific affairs have stories that testify to the validity of the sentiment echoed in this statement. It is almost paradoxical: instrumental reconciliation can be furthered only by *equal co-operation between unequal parties*.

How does one solve this paradox and overcome this structural impediment to instrumental reconciliation? I would like now to consider some principles in instrumental reconciliation that build on the work within the Peres Center for Peace and its partners in the region. The Peres Center for Peace was created more than two years ago with the purpose of encouraging joint projects between Israelis, Palestinians and other regional players. The idea behind the Center's work is to translate the signatures of Israelis and Arabs on peace agreements into a reality of regional co-operation, thereby transforming peace agreements into a regional reality of coexistence and co-operation. The Center's work has found expression in numerous projects in the fields of agriculture, commerce, education, medicine and industry. The Institute for Diplomacy and Regional Co-operation at Tel Aviv University was established jointly by the Peres Center for Peace and Tel Aviv University as an academic research institute. One of its main goals is to contribute to the formation of a systematic body of knowledge on post-conflict processes of peace building and reconciliation between former enemies. With this short introduction in mind, let me now consider some of the issues that need to be addressed when implementing programs of regional co-operation between former enemies.

Tales from the Trenches of "Regional Co-operation": Equality, Culture and Trust

(a) Equality – The "sine qua non" of instrumental reconciliation

First of all, one needs to be reminded of the almost obvious: Equality needs to be cultivated purposefully and deliberately. Let me give you two examples that exemplify this simple truism. In 1995, a Middle East economic summit was organised in Casablanca. It was the first of its kind and it aroused much excitement among Israelis. Teams were working around the clock to prepare fancy computer presentations and proposals for new joint projects between Arabs and Israelis. The Israeli delegation arrived to Casablanca in full force. This impressive and costly event did not prove to be the success everyone had hoped for. Some Arab delegates perceived the Israeli delegation as trying to flex its technological muscle to embarrass the Arabs. In some sense it did more harm than good. The Israeli side was guilty of not designing equality in a deliberate and meaningful manner. In a similar example, recounted to me by a colleague from the Peres Center for Peace, the Center sent a delegation to meet with Palestinian Health officials to discuss the establishment of a big modern medical facility designed to serve Israelis and Palestinians. The meeting was to be held in the Palestinian official's office. The Israeli delegation came into the meeting with the best of intentions. The head of the delegation, a gifted physician, opened his laptop computer, hooked it up to a portable projector and began a hi-tech presentation. The meeting did not go well. Like in Casablanca, the other side saw this laptop presentation as a reminder of Israel's superior technology. It reinforced fears of being dependent on Israeli technology, rather than promoted instrumental reconciliation.

What are the ways to build equality between unequal former adversaries? One important principle is that of *equal and continuous involvement*. Joint projects should involve all concerned parties, from the design through the implementation and running stages of the projects. Another vehicle to solve the "equality paradox" in instrumental reconciliation is to use the equalising effect of involving third parties in the project, parties who are viewed as a valuable, impartial resource by the parties involved. These two principles are echoed in a project of the Peres Center called the Young Leaders Network (YLN). It consists of about 60 young people from Egypt, Jordan, the Palestinian Authority and Israel, people below the age of 40 who are emerging as leaders

in their fields of activity in their respective countries. The group meets periodically to learn about and discuss issues of relevance to all parties. This is a project in which equality is purposefully designed. A steering committee that represents all the parties involved has designed the project as an example of the operationalisation of the principle of continuous equal involvement, and it is part of the decision process regarding its implementation and running. The principle of the equalising power of the third party is also integrated into the program. Thus, the project is being supported by UNESCO, which plays an active role in it. A more concrete example for the favourable effects of the "prestigious and trusted" third party comes from a recent meeting of the group, which was devoted to learning about negotiation. This meeting was hosted by a Spanish University, and the program consisted of learning principles of negotiation theory and practice from a resourceful and trustworthy third party: an American professor from Harvard University. This made Israelis and Arabs into students with a relatively equal status, who were learning from a Harvard professor. Issues of unequal power became irrelevant once the two sides were co-operating in the social role of students. Do similar mechanisms operate when Israeli and Palestinian leaders meet with an American president? Is making the two contesting parties phenomenologically more equal part of the implicit role of an American president in such meetings? Maybe.

(b) Interpersonal trust: The "safety net"

Joint projects of peace building are often riddled with crises and setbacks. It seems that if there is a core group of individuals who trust each other, who are with the project from its inception, and who care about its success, that they will be able to save the day when everything else threatens to collapse. There are numerous tales of joint Israeli–Palestinian projects that threatened to fold because of a string of misperceptions and misunderstandings. Fortunately, the people who were with these projects from the start had enough trust between them to get things back on course. This means that a sustainable peace–building project will benefit from a gradual build–up. The first step should consist of building a trusting and committed inner circle of partners. This inner circle will act as a buffer in the crises that must follow.

(c) Cultural differences can derail instrumental reconciliation

Another important potential impediment to peace building emanates from cultural differences. Although similar in more ways than one, Israelis and Palestinians come from different cultures. In meetings, Israelis are guided by the questions of "how to get from here to there in the shortest and fastest way." Palestinians, on the other hand, expect to first establish personal acquaintance and trust with the other side. Israelis begin the meeting by asserting their views. Palestinians begin by inquiring about the other side's opinions. They are more attentive and less directive than Israelis are. Each of these styles has its own advantages and disadvantages. There are other important differences, such as the respect for age and seniority, which is more characteristic of Arab than Israeli society. I do not propose to present a laundry list of all the differences, nor do I suggest a deterministic view of culture. Differences between people in the same culture are often greater than differences between two people from different cultures. Yet, cultural background matters, and one has to be cautious in building peace across cultures. For example, the meaning of cancellation of meetings, or coming late to the meeting, may be very different across cultures. Misunderstandings attributable to such differences may cause peace–building projects to falter and even collapse.

(d) Content Matters: Projects Should Address Real, Pressing and Common Problems

Let me close this discussion of peace building by addressing the content of peace-building projects. From my interviews with people who do the work of peace building at the Peres Center for Peace, it seems that one of the most successful areas of peace building between Israelis and Arabs has been agriculture. For example, in spite of the cold peace between Israel and Egypt, the agricultural co-operation between these two countries withstood the most turbulent political times. Even during the war in Lebanon and the Intifada, Israeli and Egyptian farmers continued to co-operate in experimental farms on the Nile Delta. Agriculture seems to have been the first solid bridge of peace between Israelis, Palestinians, Jordanians and Moroccans. Why? Is it because agriculture deals with the most common and basic human need—food? Is it because farmers have a common identity that transcends divisive national identities? The complete answer is probably made up of these two answers and more. Yet, the above tells us that the content of peace-building projects matters. Projects of instrumental reconciliation should respond to *real and pressing* needs of the former enemies. Growing food is a good example in many areas of the world. So are issues like scarce water, polluted environment, adequate medical care, or the preservation of wild life. In the Middle East, water may be a more pressing and real problem, and in former Yugoslavia the clearing of old minefields may be the pressing issue. Regardless of the specific issue, peace-building projects should centre on areas that represent *real problems for both parties*.

Some Concluding Thoughts

In this article I made some observations on the processes of peace building and reconciliation. In making these comments I relied on the reservoirs of my professional identity as a social psychologist and national identity as an Israeli Jew. I hope that some of these comments and thoughts will prove useful to my friends in former Yugoslavia. I can only hope that the "forest" of general principles that need to guide reconciliation and peace-building is visible through the "trees" of Middle East that I focused upon here.

To facilitate this transition from the specific to the general, I want to conclude by way of suggesting a few questions that may be helpful while thinking about peace-building and reconciliation in the Middle East, former Yugoslavia and elsewhere.

- (1) What was the *nature of the conflict*? An *intra-societal* conflict between communities within a single society or an *inter-nation* conflict?
- (2) What is the *post-conflict situation*? Is there a consensus on *victims and perpetrators*?
- (3) What is the *goal of reconciliation*? Is it integration of the former adversaries or their *separation*?
- (4) Is *socio-emotional reconciliation or instrumental reconciliation* appropriate?
- (5) If peace-building through regional co-operation needs to occur: (a) *equality* between the parties needs to be deliberately, purposefully and sensitively built; (b) *cross-cultural differences* need to be acknowledged and respected, (c) *interpersonal trust* needs to be at the core of regional projects, and (d) projects should be built around the *real, important and pressing needs* of the former enemies.

Contribution by Rec
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