

The Struggle is the Blessing *Raanan Mallek*

Introduction

Why do the Jewish people seemingly struggle endlessly? To answer this question, we need to turn to the source of the Jewish people's identity as Israel. The meaning of the word Israel comes from Genesis 32:29 when a mysterious figure¹ is wrestling and then renaming Jacob:

וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא יַעֲקֹב עוֹד שֵׁמֶךָ כִּי אִם יִשְׂרָאֵל כִּי שָׁרִיתָ עִם אֱלֹהִים וְעַם אָנֹכִי
וַתִּוָּכַל:

“And [the mysterious figure said] you will no longer say that your name is Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with people and you have prevailed.”

Were the story of the Jewish people summarized into one verse, this very well could be it. The blessing received by being renamed Israel, or the God Wrestler, is that although Jacob's descendants would struggle, they would prevail in the end. Although struggle and antagonism are seemingly inevitable, the blessing of the Israelites emerges through creative and inventive approaches in responding to their challenges, followed by acting in such a way as to preserve their culture and religion. Throughout the ages mighty empires have tried to destroy Judaism as a religion and the Jews as a people. Against the Roman Empire, the Jews were able to transform their religion from one of sacrifice, that was tied to a specific location (the Temple Mount), to a religion centered on prayer and a synagogue which could be constructed anywhere Jews happened to live. When faced with centuries of exile, the Jews responded with a comprehensive halachic way of looking at the world which kept them separated from the nations among whom they lived. And upon the destruction of European Jewish civilization after World War 2, the Jewish people rallied to come together in the Holy Land and build a State to secure the remnant which remained. Now that we have a Jewish State, there is a responsibility which falls upon our nation to helping resolve the identity based conflict we have been in with the Palestinian people for the past century and especially since the War of Independence/Nakba in 1948.

Theoretical and Methodological Background

Breaking conflict resolution into stages is a logical methodology for researching those processes that are helpful for reducing conflict and those that instead contribute to its perpetuation. The Realistic-Conflict Theory was named by American social scientist Donald T.

¹ Based on Hosea 12:5, the mysterious figure is an angel. The Rabbis explain in Gen. Rabbah 77:3, 78:3 that this was the guardian angel of Esau.

Campbell. It was demonstrated in an experiment run by a group of researchers led by Muzafer Sherif (1906-1988) and published in a 1961 study called *Intergroup Conflict and Cooperation: The Robbers Cave Experiment*.² The study was carried out over a period of three weeks in a summer camp located at Robbers Cave State Park in Oklahoma. The study was focused on intergroup behavior between 22 eleven and twelve year old boys who had never met but had similar backgrounds. The researchers posed as camp personnel. There were three stages to the experiment. The first stage was called “in-group formation” and split the boys into two equal groups arbitrarily. One group was called the Rattlers and the other was the Eagles. At the beginning, the groups were pleasant towards one another. During the next stage, called the “friction phase”, the researchers introduced deliberate competition between the two groups. In the contest, scarcity was created via resources that the children wanted. The researchers observed that as the competition progressed there emerged prejudice and hatred toward one another. Sherif and his colleagues came to the conclusion that competition over scarce resources preceded the hatred for the “other”.

In an attempt to reduce the prejudice, the researches attempted to preach to the children about the importance of brotherly love and the dangers of intolerance and violence. This did not work and the hatred continued. It was only when the researchers created superordinate goals that they were able to reduce the hatred. Superordinate goals is part of the the third and final stage called the “integration stage”. During this stage, tensions between the groups were reduced through teamwork-driven tasks that required intergroup cooperation. The focus was changed from competing over the coveted resource and instead there was focus placed on the need to cooperate between the two groups in order to achieve it. The researchers created situations that would bring the two groups together so that they could join forces in order to secure a goal of importance to them both. “The telling point is that after only six successive days the atmosphere had changed completely. Animosity decreased, expressions of prejudice disappeared, intolerant behavior vanished and cross-group friendships developed.”³

In the summer of 2015, I learned about another identity based conflict resolution technique called ARIA from its founder Professor Jay Rothman at Bar Ilan University. Instead of believing that conflicts are resource based, ARIA suggests that they are based in identity. The ARIA framework is named for the four phases that Rothman suggests many identity based conflicts go through: Antagonism, Resonance, Invention and Action. ARIA describes a dialogue and reconciliation process which can “foster harmony and resonance from adversaries’ full and honest expression of the deeply felt human motivations that lie beneath their conflict.”⁴ To

² Sherif, M., et al. (1961). *Intergroup Conflict and Cooperation: The Robbers Cave Experiment*. Norman. pp. 155–184.

³ Nadler, A. “Intergroup Conflict and Its Reduction,” *Israeli and Palestinian Identities in Dialogue*. New Brunswick 2004. pp. 16-17.

⁴ Rothman, J. 1997. *Resolving Identity-Based Conflict: In Nations, Organizations, and Communities*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers. p. 18.

understand the historically based *antagonism* between both sides it is important to analyze the sources of each party's animosity. I will explore how both sides of the conflict need a safe space to express their animosity so that reframing can occur and the conflict then be reframed in more productive terms. The next phase is *resonance* whose definition is the reinforcement or prolongation of sound by reflection from a surface or by the synchronous vibration of a vibrating object. This can be best described by how a guitar is naturally tuned. When a string is properly tuned, and then struck, the string next to it will vibrate. If each side in a conflict is represented by a string, this becomes a superb metaphor for how a relationship needs to emerge between two sides so as to move away from antagonism. Each side needs to be able to hear and resonate with the "other". In the ARIA framework which also uses musical metaphors, there is a process which moves the parties from antagonism to cooperation. In this phase, the sides move away from the "Us vs. Them" of the antagonism stage to a "We" attitude.

After *resonance*, the identity based conflict is ready for *inventive* solutions. In this phase, the two sides will work together based on common interests to generate solutions that will meet their needs. This is similar to the third stage of the Robber's Cave Experiment described above. Rothman explains that opposed demands may be based on different, but ultimately compatible interests. Only via conversation, after developing relationship, can these inventive ideas be discovered. In other words, differentiating the parties' underlying interests can lead to cooperative solutions. The implementation of the solution is the final *action* phase. Each part of this phase needs to be carefully planned by both sides so that it does not revert back into the antagonism stage. This is done by specifying the project's goals and intended outcomes while making explicit the motivations of both sides for why they plan to undertake the mutually agreed upon action. Ideally, an action plan in an identity based conflict will lead to more formal political negotiations so as to expand the process to the masses.

Project which Reinforced ARIA

After learning about the ARIA method, I was privileged to be able to join the Palestine-Israel Emerging Leaders Program which is operated by the Outward Bound Peacebuilders and Search for Common Ground - Jerusalem. The program began in the mountains of western Croatia with seven Palestinian and seven Israeli educators who did not know one another. We all arrived with our opposing narratives which emerged from the identity based conflict in the Holy Land and ended the program wanting to cooperate together to help each other rise above our intractable quagmire. It was fascinating to observe how the group dynamics, when guided by the challenge of nature, allowed for us to transform conflict into cooperation.

The mission statement of the Outward Bound Peacebuilders is to, "challenge and inspire emerging leaders in divided societies to work together to build peace."⁵ Using the ARIA model, I am going to theorize how the goals of the Outward Bound program address identity based

⁵ <http://outwardboundpeace.org/what-we-do/mission/>. [Accessed: Nov. 8th, 2015].

conflict. First there are participants chosen from divided societies who have displayed leadership traits. They are then challenged and inspired to work together so that they can build peace. This long term methodology is not instinctual in an age where immediate gratification is sought out mindlessly by the masses. We live in an age of memes where soundbites are communicated which in turn form the opinions of each respective side. Among other factors, nationalism fuels this phenomenon as it creates a paradigm of “us vs. them”. Either one is part of the nation or isn’t. This is made much more complicated in the State of Israel which declares itself a state for the Jewish people to rebuild its national home⁶. Its national origin story is founded in the belief that the Jewish people are a nation which deserves a nation-state like all other nations. Another deeper level is that the Jewish people believe themselves to be the descendants of the ancient Israelites and Judeans who lived in the land from the end of the second millennium B.C.E. continuously until today. The central question to be asked is how Gentiles living in Israel are to relate to a state whose *raison d’être* excludes them.

Historical Sources of Antagonism

The historical sources of antagonism weighed heavily on the participants in the program, so it is important to give some context to what each side believes. For over a century, the Palestinian and Jewish national movements have been adversaries in claiming the Holy Land for their cause. The failure of the Two State Solution over the past twenty years to divide material land based resources is one of the factors which show that the conflict is identity based at its core instead of being resource based. The impulse to return to the Land of Israel has been part of the Jewish people’s collective consciousness for the past two thousand years. The idea is firmly built into the Jewish religion where Jews will pray up to three times a day to be reinstated in their land. Few times in history was this idea actualized and translated into practical political action until Theodor Herzl, a Viennese journalist, took a stand in 1896 after seeing the deterioration of universal emancipation promised by the French Revolution a century prior. At the time, the Holy Land was a derelict sub-province of the Ottoman Empire called Palestine. It must have seemed clear to the 36 year old reporter that all that was needed was a clear modernized vision for the national aspirations of the Jewish people for them to be able to return to their ancestral lands.

The Palestinian population believed in their local leadership when they were promised national independence from the Ottoman Empire by the British Empire. Their feelings of betrayal intensified to the point where the British felt that they had no option but to restrict Jewish immigration via a series of white papers issued from 1922 and 1939. The Nazis arose during this time and by 1945 had destroyed one third of the Jewish people and a majority of its

⁶ Declaration of the Establishment of the State of Israel. May 14th, 1948. Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Website. Accessed Nov. 4th, 2015.
<<http://www.mfa.gov.il/mfa/foreignpolicy/peace/guide/pages/declaration%20of%20establishment%20of%20state%20of%20israel.aspx>>

intelligentsia. International sympathy for Zionism grew after the Shoah and by 1947, the United Nations declared that the Holy Land was to be partitioned between the Jews and the Arabs. Although the Jews accepted this arrangement, the Arabs were incited by their local leadership and the surrounding Arab nations to continue fighting against the Jews. These efforts were amplified by the high status given to Nazis in the newly independent Arab states who were fleeing the Allies that were pursuing them for their war crimes.⁷

The War of Independence, as it is known to the Israelis, or the Nakba (Catastrophe), as it is known to the Palestinians, resulted in the State of Israel gaining much more territory than originally mandated by the United Nations and the creation of 700,000 to 800,000 Palestinian refugees who fled the Holy Land willingly and unwillingly. The same number of Jews had to flee Arab countries throughout the Middle East and found safe haven primarily in the new State of Israel. For close to 70 years the conflict has raged with high death tolls on both sides. Endless wars combined with the occupation of the Palestinian populace since 1967, whose leadership are determined to destroy the Jewish State, has led to the intractable conflict we are faced with today. Generations of Palestinians and Israelis have known nothing else aside from being in the status of occupied or occupier whose effects on the soul are detrimental to both. Many psychologists even speak of national post-traumatic stress disorder being experienced by both sides as a result. Both cry for a way out and feel stuck in the current status quo. The guiding question is how we can work with the conflict so that it produces exploration, perspective taking, imagination and new discovery.⁸

The conflicting narratives of both sides polarize and blame the “other” for problems being faced daily in the occupation. Israel attempts to patronize and claim that the occupation of the Palestinian people is benevolent while the Palestinians suffer a reality that distorts the minds of youth to commit violence. Breaking such antagonism requires a new way of relating to the “other” in our midst. During most of the State of Israel’s history, the government’s relationship with non-Jews has been characterized by reacting to behavior as it emerges in daily life. Such a reactive model has kept society divided and stagnant. Most non-Jews do not feel part of the state being built around them. Instead of reacting, the ARIA model suggests that both communities be reflexive.

⁷ One of the most famous examples was Alois Brunner (1912-2010) who was an SS Officer who worked as Adolf Eichmann’s assistant. He was a commander of the Drancy internment camp outside of Paris and oversaw the deportations of tens of thousands of Jews. In Syria, he took on the name Dr. Georg Fischer and was hired as a government advisor to the Secret Police. Cf. Chandler, Adam. "Eichmann's Best Man Lived and Died in Syria." *The Atlantic*. Atlantic Media Company, 01 Dec. 2014. Web. 08 Nov. 2015.

⁸ Rothman 2012. *Ibid.* p. v.

Resonance

How can leaders of Palestinian and Israeli society resonate with one another so that they can invent ways to transform a protracted social conflict into a vehicle for jointly building a common future for the good of both peoples? The Outward Bound Peacebuilding Palestinian-Israeli Emerging Leaders Program (ELP) seeks to answer this question by contributing to a sustained shift in the way Israeli and Palestinian leaders, in a wide variety of sectors including political, private, and civil society, relate to each other, their own communities, and the Arab-Israeli conflict.⁹

Political scientists believe that there are three tracks in diplomacy which span the totality of societies in conflict.¹⁰ The first track is made up of the policy makers and political actors. The second is made up of professionals such as lawyers, advisors, peacemakers and clergy. The final track is the masses. For conflict resolution to be successful all three tracks need to be engaged systematically. Typically, dialogue projects select civil society opinion leaders which informally represent the parties (second track process) especially when official (first track) leaders have become entrenched in their positions and resistant to negotiation.¹¹

The ELP program does this as well by creating a shared experiential learning and leadership development initiative for recognized leaders from both sides of the conflict. This summer, our group of Israeli and Palestinian educators went to the Velebit Mountains in western Croatia and spent ten intense days together in a wilderness expedition. Although each of the participants came from the region that was immersed in conflict, the point of this initial expedition was to connect personally with one another. When we spoke of the conflict, it was done in an unorganized format whereas the regular activities were devoted to developing our leadership styles, group formation and learning about nature. The experience built a foundation for trust which allowed for us to communicate our reality much more effectively. Resonance was developed by virtue of the harmony that emerged via the ‘relationship building’ with the “other” which became a clear goal of the program post facto. This was done by helping the participants to become reflexively self-aware which is an “empowering process and a philosophy for both teaching and learning about peace and conflict.”¹²

We developed deep self-awareness about our thinking process by collectively writing in a journal that was passed around the group. The participants and the instructors together engaged in experiential learning activities which developed community by decentralizing the authority

⁹ <http://outwardboundpeace.org/programs/palestine-israel-emerging-leaders/> [Accessed Nov. 10th, 2015].

¹⁰ MacDonald, John, Jr., and Diane Bendahmane, eds. (1987). *Conflict Resolution: Track Two Diplomacy*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of State, Foreign Service Institute, U.S. Government Printing Office.

¹¹ Kaufman, E. Et al. “Experimenting With ARIA Globally: Best Practices and Lessons Learned.” in: *From Identity-Based Conflict to Identity-Based Cooperation*. Ed. Jay Rothman. New York 2012. pp. 51.

¹² Rothman, J. 2014. “Reflexive Pedagogy: Teaching and Learning in Peace and Conflict Studies.” *Ibid*.

figure. What transpired was a highly participatory and empowering educational process in which participants gained a better understanding of their own conflict situation. The design and the training process are formulated by the participants, rather than dictated beforehand by the instructor.¹³

Inventing and Taking Action

Near the end of the expedition, half a day was dedicated to inventing. We brainstormed ways to creatively integrate options for addressing central and underlying aspects of the conflict. I focused on the need for an Outdoor Leadership School in the Galilee which would bring together Jewish and Arab teens and young adults to develop leadership skills within the context of a comprehensive conflict resolution curriculum. The school would be immersed in the thinking of critical pedagogues like Paulo Freire whose magnum opus, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), advocates for teaching and learning to be collaborative activities of discovery and liberation so that the next generation can exit from the current status quo paradigm where both sides feel trapped in an intractable conflict. Empowering the next generation is about creating a culture of purpose “guided by passion and principle, to help students develop consciousness of freedom, recognize authoritarian tendencies, and connect knowledge to power and the ability to take constructive action.”¹⁴ These values are relevant for conflict resolution education since it, “aims to empower students to exercise their own self-determination and respect and support the self-determination of others, crucial elements for any democracy.”¹⁵ In other words, a program which reinforces empathy is essential for conflict resolution education which would be a central part of the curriculum for the outdoor leadership school.

“Learning to see yourself seeing and understand how to filter information through your own cognitive, experiential, and cultural lenses is a powerful tool in life, learning, and conflict analysis and intervention. Consciousness of one’s consciousness is both challenging and liberating. Deep insight about self and context provides a basis for empathy with others, in which one’s own self-awareness can become a tool for deep insight into another’s life and situation.”¹⁶

Conflict resolution education focuses on the process rather than outcome. Being in nature teaches that life is much more about the journey than the destination. The mediation process is the same and is primarily about ensuring that participants’ voices and concerns are

¹³ Ibid. p. 2.

¹⁴ Giroux, H. 2010. “Lessons from Paulo Freire.” *Chronicle of Higher Education*, Oct. 17th, B15-16.
<<http://chronicle.com/article/Lessons-From-Paulo-Freire/124910/>>

¹⁵ Hedeon, T. 2005. “Dialogue and Democracy, Community and Capacity: Lessons for Conflict Resolution Education from Montessori, Dewey, and Freire.” *Conflict Resolution Quarterly* 23:185-202. Also quoted in Rothman 2014
Ibid. p. 1-2

¹⁶ Rothman, J. 2014. “Reflexive Pedagogy: Teaching and Learning in Peace and Conflict Studies.” Ibid. p. 3-4.

recognized and their personhood is relationally empowered in the process of dialogue.¹⁷ Another participant, a Palestinian from Nablus, spoke of the need for a joint Israeli-Palestinian initiative to bring alternative energy to outlying Palestinian villages. All of the participants immediately began reflecting with our Palestinian colleague how we could help him with the project.

Conclusion

All four stages of ARIA can be seen in the process that developed in the program. The group began with members of an identity based conflict in a state of antagonism. Resonance was developed via the relationships each of the members developed by virtue of the reflexive process of being together in nature. Deep dialogue occurred out of the experience taking place which then allowed for discussions dedicated to the needs of each of our sides. The group then spent time in creative seclusion to inspire each other towards inventive solutions in the hope that they would result in action. A challenge with this program has been to keep the momentum going so that the proposed action does not revert back to antagonism in the face of the challenges experienced when we return to our respective environments. Rothman recognizes that the action phase may lead cyclically back to antagonism.

Encouraging this momentum to turn into action was built into the structure of the program where three months after the first experience, our cohort joined the rest of the participants from all six years of the program in Slovakia at a workshop called *Connecting the Hub*. Sadly, violence erupted throughout the Holy Land and most of the Palestinians from the West Bank declined to attend. The political reality threatened to reignite the antagonism we had tried so hard to move beyond. What stood out among our group and the previous groups was a sense that the individual relationships we developed could transcend the reality we were faced with. “Early indications demonstrate that the model can create positive and sustained intergroup relations and provide incentives for working together for change.”¹⁸ Participants attribute their recent personal and professional growth to the program. Personal conversations with a founder of the program revealed that there is hope among the leadership that the relationships among the alumni would bear fruit many years down the road when some of us attain positions of influence or become members of the first diplomatic track mentioned above. He reinforced how there was a need to expand the reach of the program which led many of the participants to advocate the organization basing itself in the Holy Land and engaging the Alumni throughout the year. I proposed to the whole group a continuation program which would take representatives from each of the cohorts and train them to be conflict resolution experts as well as Outward Bound wilderness instructors. These instructors would then lead groups along William Ury’s [Abraham Path](http://outwardboundpeace.org/programs/palestine-israel-emerging-leaders/) while performing conflict resolution activities to help both sides transcend antagonism.

¹⁷ Folger, J.P., and R.A.B. Bush. 1996. “Transformative Mediation and Third-Party Intervention: Ten Hallmarks of a Transformative Approach to Practice.” *Mediation Quarterly* 13:263-78.

¹⁸ <http://outwardboundpeace.org/programs/palestine-israel-emerging-leaders/> [Accessed Nov. 10th, 2015].

This would be a natural outlet for those seeking to create action instead of letting stagnation take hold.

Perhaps the blessing of persisting can be seen from the fact that the deepest learning takes place out of adversity.¹⁹ The Outward Bound Peacebuilding Palestine-Israel Emerging Leaders Program would not take place were it not for the conflict transpiring in the Holy Land. Jay Rothman explains that when conflict is reflexively engaged it can be transformed into the best engine for learning. When this is done in a group, the cohesion which forms between the members allows for deep empathy and bridge building. By virtue of being in nature, participants find themselves thinking critically and exploring the core assumptions they take for granted when living in a world that pushes for us to understand each other in an adversarial framework. Creativity thus emerges out of conflict and the argument can be made that both are interdependent. All of creation comes about via friction. Just as gravity is an invisible force that guides the other three fundamental forces to form the different celestial bodies, so too can conflict resolution techniques form empathetic relationships to reflexively empower both sides to emerge together out of the chaos of conflict. But like the rest of creation, this is a long term process which must be cultivated and taught generation after generation.

פרקי אבות ב:טז

[רבי טרפון אומר:] לא עליך המלאכה לגמור ולא אתה בן חורין לבטל ממנה.

Ethics of the Fathers 2:16

[Rabbi Tarfon would also say:] It is not incumbent upon you to finish the task, but neither are you free to absolve yourself from it.

¹⁹ Rothman, J. 2014. "Reflexive Pedagogy: Teaching and Learning in Peace and Conflict Studies." Ibid. p. 18.