2011

Mind the Conflict: Mindfulness and the (Israeli-Jewish) Conflict Mindset. Dis-Covering Psychological Barriers to Peace

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MIND THE CONFLICT

MINDFULNESS AND THE (ISRAELI-JEWISH) CONFLICT MINDSET

DIS-COVERING PSYCHOLOGICAL BARRIERS TO PEACE

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PIM 67

A Capstone Paper submitted in partial fulfilment

of the requirements for a Master of Conflict Transformation

at the SIT Graduate Institute in Brattleboro, Vermont, USA.

November 2011

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Acknowledgements

May all beings be happy

May all beings be free from suffering

May all beings rejoice in the well-being of others

May all beings dwell in peace

Free from greed and hatred

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Abstract

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is regarded as an intractable conflict – a lengthy, violent and seemingly insolvable conflict. Social-psychologists assert that individuals and societies entrenched in intractable conflicts develop a problematic psychological infrastructure, which is here termed the Conflict Mindset. Made up of certain attitudes, beliefs, and emotional inclinations, the Conflict Mindset serves as a double-sword: on the one hand it helps the society endure the difficulties of the ongoing conflict; on the other hand it feeds an ever escalating cycle of violence, by promoting narrow and rigid perspectives that block possibilities for change. The Conflict Mindset is only part of a set of psychological barriers that Israeli peacemakers need to grapple with. Other obstacles include denial and despair, Jewish privilege, and fear as a dominant emotional pattern.

Intergroup dialogues have been employed in the Israeli-Palestinian context to promote emotional, cognitive and behavioral changes on the individual, group and society levels. To propose an additional path for dealing with psychological barriers to peace, this capstone project aimed to design and pilot-test an intervention based on work with individuals. The one-on-one setting, combined with empathy, inquiry, and other professional tools from psychotherapy and mindfulness-based approaches, enabled right-wing pilot participants to let go of their defense mechanisms, transform strong feelings, accept new information in regards to the conflict, and adopt some new positions. The new intervention, Mind the Conflict, is presented here, including its basic building blocks and general guidelines for practitioners.

Introduction

September 2011. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is at an impasse, to a large extent due to right-wing ideology and policies of the current Israeli government and to attitudes in the Israeli-Jewish public which support it. While most Palestinians suffer daily from the hardships associated with living under foreign military occupation, the majority of Israelis are able to lead a normal and secure life style. The status quo is evidently skewed in favor of Israel, but most Israeli-Jews fail to see the reality as such and continue to profusely blame Palestinians – for being violent, for refusing Israeli proposals for settlement of crucial disagreements, or for taking one-sided steps such as appeal to the UN to recognize a Palestinian state. At the same time construction continues in the Israeli settlements in the West Bank – a key impediment to establishing a viable Palestinian state – and increased settler violence toward Palestinians goes almost unnoticed. Within Israel anti-democratic legislation is paramount and pro-peace pro-democracy activism is constantly attacked as anti-patriotic and even treacherous.

According to Israeli-Jewish social-political psychologist Daniel Bar-Tal these detrimental attitudes and behaviors are part of a social-psychological infrastructure – a set of beliefs, attitudes and emotional inclinations – which societies entrenched in lengthy, violent and seemingly insolvable conflicts, tend to develop (2007). Shared by most societal institutions and individuals this unconscious mindset becomes pervasive; as such it helps to perpetuate the conflict – it promotes narrow and rigid perspectives that block possibilities for change and for peace. I became acutely aware of the prevalence of this mindset in the Israeli-Jewish society during the war on Gaza.

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In December 2008 the Israeli government gave an order to attack and destroy the Hamas' "terror infrastructure" in the Gaza Strip, after several months of frequent missile attacks by Palestinians on Israeli towns and villages. The vast majority of Palestinian rockets fell in empty fields and mostly did not cause any harm, but they were still successful in disturbing normal life for Israeli civilians who grew accustomed to dashing into bomb-shelters. The plight of these residents, as presented in mainstream media, brought most Israelis to support the aggressive attack on Gaza – the Israeli army assaulted Gaza from the air, the land, and the sea. Due to utter lack of shelters in Gaza and physical proximity between Gazan armed-fighters and civilians, numerous Palestinian casualties were reported: within three weeks more than 1,300 Palestinians were killed and approximately 5,300 injured many of whom civilians and children (B'Tzelem, 2009). On the Israeli side 3 civilians and 10 soldiers were killed, and more than 100 civilians and 300 soldiers were injured (Zilberman, 2009).

During the war *Middleway* – a Jewish-Arab peace NGO – organized silent peace walks in main streets in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, calling on Israelis and Palestinians to acknowledge the humanity of both sides and cease the fire. Witnessing the reactions of people on the street I was amazed and alarmed at what seemed to be a very high level of dehumanization of Palestinians: Israeli-Jews were not moved by the soaring number of Palestinian losses. At this stage of mutual combat they could not see the humanity of the other side, not even of civilians who were not engaged in the fighting and had nowhere to hide. While a ceasefire was soon established, it seemed that no attention was given to the added sediments of fear and hatred in Israeli, and probably also Palestinian, psyche. The

"ceasefire within" was not declared; as the Karuna Center's model of the Cycle of Revenge (2005) suggests, the seeds of the next round of violence have been sown.

Following the war I started researching the psychological barriers to peace in Israeli-Jewish society. Soon I realized that while a wealth of information already exists on the nature and typology of such barriers, academics do not have much to offer in terms of practical application of their theories. The literature suggests that these psychological elements, fortified as they are by strong social forces, are related to the core identity of Jewish-Israelis. As suggested by Terrell Northrup (1989), they are therefore not readily malleable. Being acquainted with Jewish-Palestinian intergroup dialog on the one hand, and with mindfulness-based practices on the other hand, I became interested in developing an intervention that would assist Israeli-Jews to become aware of their conflict-related attitudes, beliefs and emotions, which I started referring to as the "conflict mindset". I envisaged that the combination of theoretical and practical knowledge from the fields of social psychology, conflict transformation and mindfulness practice could potentially also encourage Israeli-Jews to adopt some aspects of an alternative mindset, that of reconciliation.

This paper presents an Intervention Design and Development research scaled down to the scope of a capstone project. Intervention Design and Development is one aspect of Intervention Research – a research and development methodology used by social scientists to rigorously analyze a problem rising from real-world practice situations, and offer innovative interventions adapted to the needs of beneficiaries and practitioners (Fraser *et al*., 2009).

Aiming to produce both new knowledge and new (or revised) practice methods, Intervention Research consists of both research and development aspects – synthesizing existing information to generate new practice ideas, and evaluative aspects – systematically testing the new model to establish its effectiveness (Fraser *et al*., 2009). The whole process may take up to nine years and should involve a multidisciplinary team of researchers and practitioners (Rothman & Thomas, 1994). This capstone project includes an adjustment of the first four phases of the Intervention Design and Development methodology: building on existing knowledge a new intervention model was designed and developed, and a preliminary pilot test in real-world setting was conducted. General description and practice guidelines of the model are provided.

Intervention research emerged and was further developed in social and health service fields such as social work, public health, psychology, nursing and medicine (Fraser *et al.*, 2009). However, following a 5-year study of encounters between Jewish and Palestinian Israeli youth, Haviva Bar and David Bargal (1995) recommend using this methodology also in the field of peacebuilding (p. 246). As indicated above, the motivation for intervention research comes from a detection of a problem in the field. As an activist and a practitioner my experience during the war on Gaza stimulated me to better understand the psychological barriers to peace shared by many Israeli-Jews. The real-world problem which presented itself was the crucial influence of such barriers on the intractability of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Defined as such the problem led me to experiment with work on the individual level rather than to the more common practice of intergroup work.

Following a description of the research methodology and design, the problem is defined and explored in the literature review, including a short discussion of existing intergroup interventions. The new intervention rationale and practice guidelines are then described, followed by outcomes of the pilot phase, analysis of intervention mechanisms, discussion and further recommendations.

Chapter 1: Research Methodology and Design

Intervention research combines the strengths of both research and practice in the social sciences. It aims to enhance existing programs, or develop new practices, that would be useful and effective on the one hand and scientifically verified on the other hand. In the same vein, interventions in the field of peacebuilding should also be developed taking into account existing theoretical knowledge and practical experience.

In intervention research traditional scientific methods, which focus on *outcomes*, are used to evaluate the effectiveness of interventions. In addition, the methodology includes design and development phases which focus on the intervention *process*: which particular steps are needed in order to achieve a desired change, and how should these be implemented by practitioners to ensure program effectiveness. Special emphasis is given to on-site research activities: practitioners are consulted during problem definition and program development phases and pilot tests are conducted in real-world settings, usually in full collaboration with relevant organizations and staff members. On the other hand, new interventions are created here not in the course of natural experimentation with new

strategies as part of ongoing practice, but due to the application of an intentional research and development process: from problem definition, through extensive literature review, to systematic evaluation of the new program following the pilot phase. In actual fact, the innovative and the evaluative phases of intervention research are interlaced. For example, conclusions and generalizations from the information gathering and synthesis phase are expressed as action concepts, which are further developed during the design stage into the initial building blocks of the intervention (Mullen in Rothman and Thomas, 1994:172). As Fraser, Richman, Galinsky and Day put it: "imaginatively drawing on the literature to create engaging practice content" (2009:35). Fraser *et al.* also emphasize the importance of creating intervention materials, such as prototype manuals or practice guidelines, early in the research process. Following each testing and evaluation phase these guidelines are revised and expanded, hand-in-hand with the refinement of the program, to provide full specification of the intervention's goals, components and activities. For a short description of the six phases of intervention research see Table 1 on the next page.

For the purpose of this capstone project a more condensed research process was adopted, consisting mainly of design and development. The aim of the research was to design and pilot-test an intervention method for working individually with adult Israeli-Jews to promote a change in their attitudes, feelings and beliefs regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, as well as the possibility for peace.

The definition of the problem to be addressed as *psychological barriers to peace within the Jewish-Israeli society* led to a literature review of representative resources from three fields: (a) conflict social-psychology, in particular in relation to the Israeli-

Palestinian conflict, from the point of view of Israeli-Jews; (b) existing methods for

attitude change in conflict situations, mainly research on encounters between Israeli-Jews

and Palestinians, with a focus on the Jewish participants; and (c) different approaches for

changing individuals' thought-patterns, in particular mindfulness-based therapies.

Table 1: Intervention Research Phases and Activities *		
	Intervention Research Phases	**Research and Development Activities**
1	Problem analysis and project planning	・ Identify and specify the problem – develop a problem theory ・ Determine feasibility of the project ・ Prepare project plan and create relevant partnerships
2	Information gathering and synthesis	・ Conduct multidisciplinary literature review ・ Consult with experts, including practitioners and potential consumers ・ Research existing programs – learn from successes and failures ・ Extract practice guidelines and develop the intervention theory of change
3	Design	・ Design program components ・ Develop measurement models ・ Develop first draft of program manual and other materials, including sessions' goals and activities
4	Early development and pilot testing	・ Pilot test the intervention in a real-world setting ・ Revise and expand manual ・ Confirm program components
5	Evaluation and Advanced development	・ Conduct efficacy trials to assess intervention outcomes ・ Develop rules for adaptation of program in a variety of settings and circumstances
6	Dissemination	・ Publish findings and program materials ・ Develop training protocol and accreditation process

* Based on Rothman and Thomas, 1994 and Fraser *et al*., 2009.

Three[1] practitioners were invited to join a research team: a clinical social-worker, who works as a psychologist, a psychotherapist, and a mindfulness-based therapist. The practitioners were chosen according to three criteria: Professional experience as a psychologist/therapist who works individually with clients; interest in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and actual involvement in peace work; and interest and experience in mindfulness practice. The three practitioners, all women, volunteered their time freely to the project due to their personal commitment to advance peace and social-justice for Israelis and Palestinians. Another practitioner, a cognitive-behavioral therapist, provided consultation along the way.

The work of the team consisted of three phases:

Phase 1 (June 2010 – January 2011) – Learning and problem analysis: resources assembled during the literature review were discussed by the team to create a common understanding of the problem of psychological barriers to peace, and to form the base for the intended intervention. General background to conflict transformation was also provided.

The intervention's theory of change was defined, including goals and general guidelines for practitioners.

Phase 2 (February – May 2011) – Program design & development: a mock-pilot was conducted with three volunteers to mimic the opening activity of the intervention and enable the research team to proceed with the design.

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[1] During the research project another three therapists (two females and a male) were involved in the research team for short periods. Two of them left the project due to personal circumstances, and the third was asked to leave due to differences in approach which became unfavorable for progress.

The five sessions of the pilot were specified and a participant-recruitment strategy developed.

Phase 3 (June – October 2011) – Pilot test and model refinement: two full pilot-tests of five sessions each were conducted by team members with participants recruited from the general Israeli-Jewish public.

Refinements were incorporated into the intervention manual and recommendations were made for further development and testing of the intervention model.

The research team met approximately every 2-4 weeks, as needed, both in person and through Skype. All meetings were audio-recorded and summarized to enable optimal tracking of the intervention design and development process. All materials were prepared by the writer and reviewed by team members.

Research Design – Pilot Phase

The two pilots were designed according to accepted human subject review considerations and data-analysis requirements. In line with pilot practices within intervention research the purpose of data collection and analysis was to scrutinize the process of the intervention being designed. In this instance, as the intervention is based on the interaction between the practitioner and the participant, the main function of data analysis was to identify critical incidents that changed the course of the conversation toward desirable outcomes.

1. Mock Pilot

Three adult Israeli-Jews were recruited for participating in a one-hour long private session with a research-team member. One was a 68 year-old woman, and the other two were men in their 30's. Approached by friends or family members of the writer the three were asked to help in research concerning attitudes to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. No remuneration was offered. Each session was held by a different research-team member in a private setting convenient for the participant (two were held in private homes and one in an office). The sessions were audio-recorded and transcribed.

The purpose of this mock pilot was to simulate the first out of five sessions constituting the initial design of the intervention. Participants were asked to talk about their subjective experience of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The practitioner's role was to listen empathetically and ask neutral questions to further stimulate the telling.

The transcripts were used for analyzing triggers offered by the practitioners and their responses to the participants, and for identifying topics which could potentially be explored with the participant as well as ways to approach such topics.

2. Pilot Test

Two adult Israeli-Jews were recruited for participating individually in a series of five weekly one-hour-long sessions. The series were held in professional settings (clinics), each by a different research team member.

Initially the invitation for the process was advertised in the public space (on the Internet and on a university notice-board). Later, a snowball recruitment strategy – a friend brings a friend – was used (Horton-Deutsch and Horton, 2003). While clearly

indicating that this was part of a research, the invitation emphasized the self-inquiry aspect of the process, to encourage only those who would have a clear motivation to participate in such a process to volunteer. No remuneration was offered. 8 people approached the team, 3 women and 5 men, out of which two men in their 30's were selected due to their right-wing political inclination, as identified in a preliminary conversation. It was decided by the research team that such a political inclination would provide a stronger base for testing the intervention.

Each participant filled a questionnaire prior to the commencement of the sessions, to provide a baseline for the research. The Likert questionnaire, developed by Anat Zafran (2002) and based on Bar-Tal's work (2007), measures the willingness of Israeli-Jews to compromise, or not, in relation to the conflict.

All sessions were audio-recorded, transcribed, and coded for triggers, responses and possible discussion topics, as described in the mock-pilot. At the conclusion of each series of five sessions a semi-structured interview was conducted with the participant to collect additional data regarding the intervention process. In particular, if a change in attitude has occurred during the process, the interview aimed to examine what in the intervention process contributed to this change and how.

Chapter 2: Literature Review – The Problem Context

"Meta-political, psychological and conceptual problems prevent rational treatment of the political issues. Discussing the conflict merely from a political viewpoint is a simplistic and misleading approach" (Meron Benvinisti, 1992 in Bar-Tal, 2007:16).

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is considered to be an intractable conflict – a lengthy, violent and seemingly insolvable conflict. According to social-psychologist Daniel Bar-Tal, under such conditions a psychological infrastructure develops both on the level of society and within individual society members of all conflict parties (2007). This psychological infrastructure, made up of certain beliefs, attitudes and emotional inclinations, serves as a double-sword: on the one hand it mobilizes society members to fight for its survival and helps them face the emotional pressures of the ongoing conflict; on the other hand it feeds an ever escalating cycle of violence by promoting narrow and rigid perspectives that block possibilities for change.

The integrative approach to conflict transformation recognizes attitudes and beliefs of conflict parties as inseparable from the other two aspects of conflict: the incompatibility or contradiction between the goals of conflict parties, and their behavioral patterns (Galtung and Tschudi, 2002). Unresolved contradictions lead to polarization and accumulation of negative attitudes and assumptions, which in turn cause conflict parties to believe that only violence would be effective in solving the conflict. Violent behavior escalates the conflict and usually exacerbates the initial contradiction (Kramer and Nicolescou, n.d., personal communication). Power asymmetries which underlie societal structures and deep cultural norms also influence conflict dynamics.

Intergroup dialogue methodologies were developed in order to reduce tensions between members of conflict parties and remove negative stereotypes and prejudices. A common assumption is that dialogue would transform conflict-laden relationships and create the possibility for peaceful cooperation between members of the conflicting groups (Kahanoff, 2010). The question is how successful is dialogue in encouraging participants to rethink their basic assumptions and change their preconceived evaluations – about themselves, the other, and the conflict itself.

According to Terrell Northrup (1989) identity plays a significant role in the development and maintenance of intractable conflicts. In societies subjected to such conflicts, the identity of many individual members of society relates to their opposition to the "enemy" and to their strong need to protect themselves. At the subconscious level of identity, both collective and individual, lie cognitive and emotional aspects that make up the Deep Culture of a certain group (Galtung and Tschudi, 2002). In conflict situations these internalized shared meanings become pathologized. They are based on dichotomy and notions of eternal battle between "good" and "evil", as well as on deep feelings of trauma or glory (Galtung and Tschudi, 2002). These notions surface into everyday reality in myriad ways: through national symbols (anthem, monuments), cultural products (books, movies, songs), and daily statements by opinion-shapers (leaders, teachers, journalists). As such they determine what is good, true and right, and what is bad, false and wrong, and impact the attitudes and assumptions of individuals in the conflict. While deep culture is difficult to change, a first important step is raising awareness to its existence and to its impact on the conflict (Sipes, 2010).

Israeli-Jewish social psychologists continuously demonstrate the prevalence of conflict-supporting beliefs, attitudes and emotional inclinations within the Israeli-Jewish society. Three categories of psychological barriers, which hinder the ability of Israeli-Jews to relate to Palestinians as equal human beings with legitimate needs and rights, have been identified in the literature and are explored below: denial of disturbing information, the conflict mindset, and Jewish privilege. In addition, the role of fear, as a prevailing emotional inclination, is examined.

Psychological Barriers to Peace within Jewish-Israeli Society

1. Protection from Disturbing Information – Denial and Despair

People ordinarily and unconsciously use psychological mechanisms of avoidance and denial to block disturbing information and save themselves from acknowledging painful truths, especially when those relate to them personally. As Stan Cohen suggests, sometimes the truth is too painful to be known. When the information is too threatening to be acceptable, it is indeed unaccepted (1989:48-9).

While criminologists and sociologists investigate what keeps people from responding to someone else's distress, for example in the case of sexual abuse in the family, the phenomenon of "by-standing" also has collective implications. Collective indifference influences the silence of individuals (Ernan and Luria, 1989). People look to each other to determine whether an emergency occurs; when others do not respond they also define the situation as normal.

In the context of their response to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict Israeli-Jews may experience a strong cognitive dissonance in regards to their self-image. On the one hand

they want to see themselves as honest, moral and non-violent people. On the other hand, there is a daily reality of violence inflicted on Palestinians, often on innocent civilians, by an army which is not separated from "me" – if it is not me today, then it was me in the past, or it is my siblings, friends, spouse and offspring – currently or in the future. Information about unethical actions by Israeli soldiers, either in the past or in the present – from abuse and humiliation to torture, rape and murder – is unknowable for the majority of Israeli-Jews. The same is true for discriminatory and harmful actions and policies of the Israeli governmental apparatus.

Psychological mechanisms for dealing with disturbing information include for example blaming and demonization of the other side; splitting between "we" the "good" and "they" the "bad"; screening, denial and suppression of information related to the conflict; repackaging of information to make it more acceptable (e.g., "this awful behaviour is an exception", or "the media always exaggerates"); and dealing with abstractions rather than with subjective experience (see for example Kim Chernin, 2009).

These protective mechanisms contribute to a skewed perception of reality, which may cause people to be shocked and overreact when events hit close by. However, most Israeli-Jews "choose" denial over knowledge. Feeling helpless to influence the intractable reality of the conflict, and baffled by inaction at the political level, they seemingly have no other choice. To avoid despair they deny.

2. A Collective Emotional Inclination of Fear

Societies entrenched in an intractable conflict tend to develop collective emotional inclinations of fear, anger and/or hate (Bar-Tal, 2007). In the case of the Israeli-Jewish

society, due to a collective memory of persecution, it is fear. Kim Chernin offers some

observations into the Jewish psyche of fear:

> Fear causes us to feel ever attacked, ever in danger. Any criticism, internal or
> external, is perceived as existential threat… We occupy the whole space of "being
> at risk" – we and only we are in danger. Anyone claiming to also be endangered is
> against us and is trying to negate our full right to this property. Since we are in
> danger, we cannot inflict harm on others…
> The fear is total. Nothing can change the perception of danger – neither our
> strength, nor their weakness… (2009).

A collective emotional inclination evolves when people share the same direct

experience or receive information regarding an ongoing situation from normative

communication channels (Bar-Tal, 2007). When an emotion becomes a unique

characteristic of society as a whole, various societal factors – such as the media or

educational and cultural institutions – are able to have a great deal of influence on the

feelings of individuals.

The presence of direct violence, concrete danger and constant threat stimulates the

development of personal and collective fear. Fear is a primary negative emotion that acts

as a protective mechanism: it fuels an automatic response in situations of threat and

danger. Neurologists have demonstrated unconscious activity in certain parts of the brain

in reaction to fear (Goleman, 2005), that may stimulate the whole body to alertness and

then to emergency response (Ross, 2008). Life experiences condition the mind to

recognize certain cues as threats. To maximize protection, some of the cues are

unspecific, and with time memories get altered to include in the "fear database" even cues

which are originally unthreatening (Bar-Tal, 2007).

Empirical studies demonstrate that fear limits cognitive abilities. It causes people to stick to that which is familiar and resist change, in order to avoid uncertainty and risk. The ability to weight alternatives, consider new ideas, and think creatively is reduced. In Israel a direct link has been shown between feelings of threat and inflexible attitudes in relation to a possible resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Bar-Tal, 2007).

The implications of these characteristics for a society in which many people have an emotional inclination of fear, are severe. Fear becomes contagious and people tend to react automatically even to cues which are not related to danger or threat. They screen available information and highlight that which confirms their perspective about threat. They also tend to exaggerate in their risk assessment. Leaders take advantage of this situation and constantly use fear to manipulate public opinion. Importantly, strategies of self-defence may be perceived as ineffective, leading to a greater tendency to initiate aggression.

The constant feelings of fear and threat on personal and collective security in Israel has been one of the main factors in the development of the Israeli-Jewish "security mindset" – the higher value and priority given to the military and to militarism (Bar-Tal, 2007), which influences all aspects of life in Israel. It is important to note that Israel and Israeli-Jews do face threats from different factors. However, as Yizhar Be'er[2] asserts, "the question is whether we want the paranoia and anxieties to lead us, or do we want to control them... a healthy society does not ignore, does not deny, threats. But it is also not managed by them" (Be'er in Lifshits, 2011).

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[2] Yizhar Be'er is the executive director of "Keshev", an Israeli media-watchdog NGO.

3. The Conflict Mindset

The social-psychological infrastructure described by Daniel Bar-Tal (2007)[3] and other social- or political-psychologists helps people and societies cope with the difficulties of living within an intractable conflict. This set of opinions, positions, values, social beliefs, and emotional inclinations dictates the way society members perceive the conflict, themselves in relation to it, and the other side – "the enemy". A prism is created through which those who are born, raised and persist within the conflict interpret its daily reality as well as the justifications to maintain the situation. On the societal level this prism shapes policies and decisions – it paints the speeches of leaders, all forms of art and culture, the national calendar, school text-books, and the media. National institutions give a special emphasis to assigning these values to young generations and to new Jewish immigrants. To express the pervasiveness of the social-psychological infrastructure, and its control of the psyche and consciousness, I chose to term it the "conflict mindset".

The conflict mindset does not point to intrinsic negative attributes of those who unconsciously hold to it. On the contrary, it is a tragic[4] consequence of the conflict, and it is created due to vital psychological functions (Bar-Tal, 2007). As the conflict erupts and evolves people need logical explanations that would help them maintain a sense of meaning, a sense of security, and a sense of control over their lives. As society members develop high levels of loyalty, solidarity and motivation – to contribute and to sacrifice –

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[3] Bar-Tal has researched and written extensively on this subject, and has summarized much of his work in a comprehensive book published in Hebrew in 2007. For an example of his work see Bar-Tal, 2005.
[4] Nahi Alon and Haim Omer (2005) offer the tragic approach as a substitute for the demonic approach. Instead of relating to the other side in the conflict as evil and demonic, they encourage a broad and deep perception of factors in reality as natural even if tragic developments.

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the resolve and the perseverance of the society as a whole increase. People stand unified and are recruited – to fight and to justify the fighting.

Based on Bar-Tal's extensive account of conflict-related attitudes and beliefs the following can be presented as the essence of the conflict mindset:

> Our goals are justified and existential. For ever we wished for peace, but the other side instigated the conflict, and due to its violent and cruel character, which is intrinsic and unchangeable, it also continues to attack us. Since the other side understands only power we must use all the military means at our disposal to protect ourselves and ensure our personal and collective security.

> The course of history continuously proves that the whole world is against us and that we can trust no one but ourselves. The whole nation must therefore recruit and unify for the mission – in the name of our history and our national goals, and for the sacred memory of those who have sacrificed themselves. Each and every one of us must therefore do all they can to secure the peace we all yearn for as a nation.

In relation to the Israeli-Jewish society Bar-Tal examines both factors related to the past, such as a collective memory of violence, and factors related to the present and the future, such as central themes in the societal conflict ethos.

Israeli-Jews hold a collective memory of historical persecutions which culminated in the Holocaust. What started in the Jewish religion and culture as a siege mentality – a claim that the whole world has always been, and will always be, against us – continued in the experience and memory of genocide; these brought to the development of chronic feelings and beliefs of insecurity, fear and victimhood. As a result Zionists and then Israel as a society developed a dominant security discourse: on the one hand a constant sense of threat, and on the other hand security as a supreme cultural symbol and a central consideration in all aspects of life, beyond diplomacy and all other national priorities.

The conflict with the Arabs, and the Palestinians, is perceived as a new aspect of anti-Semitism. Perceptions of self-victimhood and self-righteousness are amplified by severe dehumanization and delegitimization of the Palestinians – a crucial psychological factor in the perpetuation of the conflict. There is a strong rejection of the Palestinians – their culture, history and national aspirations – and a negative homogenization of them as a group – "all Palestinians are terrorists". As the enemies are unworthy, a non-normative violent behavior toward them is permissible.

The negative perception of the Palestinians helps Israeli-Jews explain the conflict situation and provides them with a sense of separation and superiority. It allows them to adhere to their own national goals, refuse any compromise, and still perceive themselves as a peace-loving nation. The high emotions associated with conflict-related deaths and injuries make it harder for society members and leaders to compromise. Blaming the Palestinians for their losses, mainstream Israeli-Jews demand high levels of patriotism and unity within their society and initiate sanctions against anyone who expresses a different point of view.

The conflict mindset blocks change since it exists both on the individual and the collective levels. People perceive their interpretation of the conflict as an objective reality, and this view is reflected back to them in numerous ways – via other people's reactions and feelings, and through all societal communication and cultural channels.

4. Jewish Privilege and Sense of Entitlement

Many Israeli-Jews relate to Palestinians from an unconscious taken-for-granted position of superiority and condescendence. Similar to whites in the U.S.A. they are blind to their

inherited privileges as a hegemonic majority group. An attitude of privilege is the reflection of the power asymmetry and power structures, that characterize the reality of the conflict, on the individual psychological level.

According to Tim Wise (2008), invisible social conditions enable privileged groups to accumulate benefits and ascribe the resulting economic and social gaps to the "inferior" culture and traits of the deprived groups. A change is possible when the privileged group not only becomes aware of the power imparity, but is also willing to give up some of its privileges. However, sociologists point to the tendency of dominant groups to protect their superiority and control over other groups (Sonnenschein, 2008), especially when they feel that their material and immaterial assets are threatened. The paranoia of losing these advantages (Wise, 2008) may prompt increased intimidation and discrimination toward minority groups.

The hegemony of Jews in the state of Israel has been secured since its establishment. Regarded as enemies, Palestinians[5] who remained in Israel after the 1948 war were placed under a military regime, which lasted until 1967. The most prominent concern of Israeli state institutions, in relation to Israeli-Palestinians, was how to ensure their social, economic and political inferiority in order to prevent them from harming the state; policies of segregation, exclusion and discrimination ensued (Bäuml, 2007).

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[5] Terminology related to identities in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is sensitive. Until the second Palestinian uprising (Intifada) which started in October 2000, it was common to relate to Palestinian citizens of Israel as "Arabs", and to joint activities as "Jewish-Arab". With the rise in political self awareness of Israeli-Palestinians, and their identification with Palestinians living in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, many practitioners and academics now relate to them (and to themselves) as Palestinians. In this paper the term "Palestinians" is mostly used, unless there is a specific reference to the term "Arab".

Yair Bäuml maintains that some Israelis who grew up in those years did not even know that there was a Palestinian population within Israel. From the point of view of the Jewish public, all the efforts of the state were meant to serve them. In their public speeches, Jewish political leaders utterly ignored the Palestinians and related to the Jews as the only people making up the Israeli nation and state. In following years, a policy of partial integration did bring Palestinians to work in the Jewish sector, but only as low-paid workers. Up until now, Israeli-Jews meet Israeli-Palestinians mostly randomly, and almost exclusively as blue-collar workers (Kahanoff, 2010).

Jewish privilege and sense of entitlement spur a range of beliefs and attitudes that dictate a patronizing approach toward Palestinians and contribute to political stagnation. For example, the religious approach of Jews as the "chosen people" has infiltrated the secular state and contributes to this sense of superiority (Bar-On, 1999). Also, the security discourse and the siege mentality bring Israeli-Jews to ignore the rest of the world – let alone Arabs and Palestinians. As the stronger party in this asymmetrical conflict, a common attitude is that the Jewish side is entitled to force its own agenda, or solution, rather than accepting a mutually agreed one (Ofer Zalzberg quoted in David Kahane, 2010; Klieman, 2005).

Finally, privilege enables most Israeli-Jews to lead a more-or-less normal life and ignore the acute daily implications of the conflict for Palestinians. Dealing with their daily efforts of living most Israeli-Jews do not have an interest or motivation to make an effort to change the conflict situation. Stan Cohen (1989) also describes a *saturation syndrome* – as time passes by, horror stories about the latest injustices toward

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Palestinians become routine and retreat to the background. He concludes that privilege allows people to naïvely ignore reality.

Nava Sonnenschein, an academic and practitioner in the field of Jewish-Palestinian dialogue, tells about her personal experience when first coming to live in the joint Jewish-Arab village of Neve Shalom Wahat al-Salam (Oasis of Peace). She testifies about the challenge of discarding her automatic positions of "the one who knows" and "the one who is used to set the agenda", when coming to make decisions jointly with fellow Palestinians villagers. She maintains that real equality is possible, but it requires people to let go of their exclusive sense of ownership over their home. This demands constant devotion for self-examination. In her research on Israeli-Jewish attitudes within a dialogue process with Israeli-Palestinians she demonstrates the aggressive tactics used by the Jewish group to maintain its cultural and moral superiority over the Palestinians. Only when they were able to acknowledge their position of power and let go, at least theoretically, of the Jewish hegemony in the state, could the dialogue evolve into more productive lines.

Changing Individuals in Conflict – The Israeli-Jewish Context

Peacebuilding interventions aspire to drive positive change – either on the individual, the intergroup or the societal levels (Shapiro, 2005). However, introducing change into systems – be they individual people, organizations, or society in large – is difficult. For people living within intractable conflicts an attempt to influence their attitudes and assumptions in relation to the conflict may be experienced as a threat to their core identity

(Northurp, 1989), leading to activation of psychological defense mechanisms that stir up resistance (Sternberg, 2008).

In the Israeli-Palestinian context, as elsewhere in the world, encounters between members of groups in conflict – and specifically dialogue interventions – have become a major approach for improving intergroup relations (Kahanoff, 2010). Through encounter interventions changes are expected to occur on three levels: cognitively – influencing change in positions, perceptions, stereotypes and prejudices; emotionally – processing of mutual feelings and emotions between the groups; and behaviorally – increasing the willingness of group members to meet and cooperate with the other group (Amir and Ben-Ari, 1987 in Friedberg, 2007). In particular, intergroup dialogue is considered to be a transformative process that enables each side to reconstruct its own identity, and its understanding of the identity of the other, in new ways which are more aware, mature and accommodating (Maoz, Steinberg, Bar-On and Fakhereldeen, 2002; Sonnenschein 1999 in Sonnenschein 2008).

Since the 1960s three main approaches to Israeli-Palestinian dialogue have evolved: the *Coexistence* approach, the *Intergroup* or *confrontation* approach, and the *Reflection and Trust* or *narrative* approach. The three are based on different practices and theories of change and offer distinct ways of working with groups in conflict.

The coexistence approach is largely based on the *Contact Hypothesis*, which assumes that the core problem of intergroup conflict is prejudice on the individual level; educational failure causes ignorance about other groups and cultures (Hewstone and Brown, 1986 in Abu Nimer, 1999). Proponents of this approach maintain that concentrated

contact between members of conflicting groups creates acquaintance and mutual understanding and acceptance (Abu Nimer, 1999). The encounters emphasize similarity between the groups, personal interactions, and interdependent cooperation toward shared goals (Maoz, 2001).

Since the mid 1980s, and even more so during and after the first Palestinian Intifada,[6] Israeli dialogue practitioners increasingly recognized the importance of embedding encounters within the social-political reality of the conflict. Criticism of the coexistence approach implied that it was the interest of the dominant group, here the Jewish-Israelis, to avoid discussing any aspect of the conflict in order to maintain their position of power – both within the room and in reality (Friedberg, 2007). Theorists now suggested that the core problem of intergroup conflict is institutionalized discrimination (Pettigrew, 1986, in Abu Nimer, 1999) which materializes into a significant power-asymmetry. Being the hegemonic group, Israeli- Jews have better access to decision-makers and to material and cultural resources (Maoz, 2001). In addition, researchers concluded that prejudice and stereotypes are deeply ingrained in individuals' psychological systems and are not likely to change without a concerted effort (Amir, 1976 in Friedberg, 2007).

The Intergroup approach was developed in the joint Israeli-Palestinian village of Neve Shalom Wahat al-Salam in the 1990s as a result of the above observations. Not shunning away from confrontation and discomfort this approach aims to expose and challenge deep psychological constructs of participants as well as the power asymmetry

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[6] The first Palestinian popular un-armed uprising, started in 1987.

between the groups. The encounter is mostly rife with antagonism, as participants blame

each other for their involvement in the conflict. This experience is especially challenging

for the Israeli-Jews who are forced, mostly for the first time, to face their own privilege

and arrogance, as it is reflected back to them by the Palestinians.[7]

Protagonists of the *Reflection and Trust* approach contended that while it was

important to bring the conflict into the dialogue, a level of personal relationships and

empathy between participants was required in order for desired changes to take place

(Friedberg, 2007). Nava Sonnenschein, Rabah Halabi and Ariela Fridman identified three

stages in the development of encounter groups. An initial stage of dishonest unity and

mutual affection is followed by the eruption and expressions of the conflict. In the third

stage initial signs of dialogue on equal terms appear and allow the group to begin a deep

exploration of the conflict (1998, in Bar On, Litvak-Hirsh and Othman, 2007). However,

Bar On *et al.* assert that many groups get stuck in the second conflictual stage and are

unable to reach beneficial dialogue (2007). Maoz *et al.* suggested that friendship with a

member from the other group, combined with the ability to confront the other group and

expresses differences and disagreements, enabled participants to re-evaluate their

personal and collective identities (2002). In the *Reflection and Trust* approach

participants share personal stories embedded in collective narratives. The storytelling

encourages the group to build trust, create a strong emotional container, and take in the

reality of the conflict. Dan Bar-On explains that the process allows participants to let go

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[7] For information about the Intergroup Approach in English see Rabah, 2004.

of their sense of being victimized and reconstruct a more complex identity, which also admits to being a perpetrator (2000 in Salomon, 2004).

Maya Kahanoff remarks that literature in the field of conflict resolution "mostly presents dialogue as a panacea that is supposed to change the conflictual relationships between the conversing opponents and create a feeling of partnership and the building of a peace-promoting community […]" (2010:218).[8] She maintains that ideal descriptions and naïve expectations ignored the difficulties associated with meeting an adversary. Israeli-Jews and Palestinians come to dialogue encounters with two divergent sets of expectations and dialogical cultures: the Palestinians emphasize political aspects and want to clarify and remove discrimination and injustice. They ache for real improvements in their daily reality; the Jews see the encounter as an opportunity for acquaintance with the other side. They emphasize unity and a wish for peace which is mostly detached from the reality of the conflict. Using these two ethnocentric perspectives of dialogue the groups talk in two parallel lines which do not meet, often for a very long time (Kahanoff, 2010). Shoshana Steinberg found that groups move through a succession of dialogic styles – starting with the ethnocentric exchange and ending, after considerable fluctuations, with a conversation that includes some "dialogical moments". These are glimpses of emotional and cognitive inclusion, in which participants are able to empathize with the experience of the other side without losing their own sense of identity (2002, in Sonnenschein, 2008).

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[8] My free translation from Hebrew.

This condensed review of theory and practice of dialogue encounters in Israel seeks to examine what enables – or hinders – change on the individual level in the context of existing interventions, and in particular for Israeli-Jews. If programs intend to encourage Israeli-Jews to face the reality of the conflict and examine their internalized perceptions regarding themselves and the other side, they ought to provide appropriate conditions: they must deal directly with issues related to the conflict and to power relations but avoid a style of discussion that locks Israeli-Jews into defensiveness. They must also allow for a lengthy process that would enable participants to build trust and overcome psychological barriers on the road from "ethnocentric talk" to "dialogical moments".

Chapter 3: Intervention Rationale – From Problem to Intervention[9]

The problem which the intended intervention aims to address is defined as such:

Due to their automatic emotional and cognitive reactions to the conflict, and the way those are constantly reinforced by societal factors, many Israeli-Jews are unable to accept new information about the conflict; therefore movement toward resolution is blocked.

This definition of the problem provides a leverage point for intervention: people are capable of learning how to identify, be aware of, control and even change their automatic

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[9] The first part of this chapter is based on the *Intervention Innovation* stages as described by Rothman and Thomas (1994) and Fraser *et al.* (2009) and on typologies of theories of practice and change in the field of peacebuilding by Shapiro (2005) and Ross (2000).

reactions. Furthermore, once they become aware of the process of societal persuasion, people may become immune of further such influence.

While existing intergroup interventions already succeed, to various degrees, in reducing prejudice, increasing knowledge and changing psychological patterns, here an additional route for change on the individual level is proposed – that of individual work with Israeli-Jews. It is suggested that such a setting can provide for a more focused and directed work with specific psychological obstacles to peace that an individual may be experiencing.

The intervention consists of a series of weekly one-on-one meetings between a specially-trained practitioner and an individual who is interested in participating in such a process. It is based on four components: empathy; preparedness of the practitioner; awareness and mindfulness; and self-motivation of the participant.

Empathy allows participants to lower their protective shields by reinforcing their positive self-image (see for example, Sonnenschein, 2008:205-7). The felt-sense of acceptance and non-judgment enables them to tell their story to the fullest, without avoiding emotions, thoughts and declarations (Salomon, 2004) which might otherwise be deemed as negative or even unacceptable. Such psychological safety is required for processes of change on the individual level to occur. It enables a person to move beyond the disequilibrium caused by new knowledge into a process of cognitive redefinition and broadening (Schein, 1996 in Sternberg, 2008).

Practitioner's Preparedness: While empathy is a basic tool for any psychotherapist here it poses a challenge as the practitioners themselves are also Israeli-Jews. Being

subject to the same pressures of living within the conflict they also hold a set of opinions and automatic reactions in regards to the conflict, which they must be aware of if they want to be able to fully support any participant who may choose to partake in the process. The practitioner training process would be designed to facilitate such preparedness.

Awareness is suggested as the first step in moving toward positive change in intractable personal conflicts (Horton-Deutsch and Horton, 2003). Typically people respond to reality in preconditioned ways – newly perceived stimuli are almost instantaneously associated with past experiences, memories and judgments, making it very difficult to have an unmarked impression of a situation (Brown, Ryan and Creswell, 2007). In conflict situations such "mindless" reactions are often translated into high emotion, overreacting and lack of self-control (Horton-Deutsch and Horton, 2003), which is evident both in individual and collective conflicts. Becoming aware of their automatic cognitive and emotional reactions allows people to start dismantling such conditioning (Pelled, 2007).

Continued self-inquiry of reactions to stimuli illuminates the functioning of the mind. When mindfulness develops the person is able to pay attention to his/her reactions not only retroactively but also at the moment of their occurrence. Such awareness in the present moment enables the mind to be more open for new information and different points of view (Horton-Deutsch and Horton, 2003). People who practice awareness and mindfulness may even be able to alter or stop their automatic reactions, for example by becoming aware of the impulse to act which is triggered by a strong stimuli, before the action itself occurs (Goleman, 2003:197).

Finally, ***self-motivation*** is a crucial aspect of the intervention process. As Scott London[10] points out, people are reluctant to change as change is uncomfortable and demands much energy (1996). For the intervention to succeed participants must be willing to observe unflattering patterns in themselves, as well as allow themselves to open up to new inputs and understandings. As the subject of the inquiry is their own inner world in relation to the conflict, they ought to be aware in advance of the nature of the process and choose to participate and commit to it out of their own free will.

The one-on-one setting of the intervention is expected to provide a unique container for the above components. Empathy and acceptance would help to establish trust between the practitioner and the participant, allowing the latter to feel more at ease in exposing his/her inner thoughts and feelings. While in a group setting people often feel judged or even attacked by other group members, here there is no need to compare oneself to others or to compete for attention. Furthermore, in intergroup dialogue between members of conflict parties, Israeli-Jews may feel threat, confusion, embarrassment, and ambivalence due to the disconfirmation of their identity resulting from the encounter with Palestinians (Kahanoff, 2010). While all these feelings might as well arise in the one-on-one process, the setting would allow the practitioner and the participant to identify them in real time and use the discomfort to leverage the inquiry process. Finally, the undivided attention of the practitioner and the participant would enable a focused inquiry, with the practitioner being able to challenge the participant in pertinent and precise ways, to deepen and

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[10] London refers here to an idea by Philip Slater, in the book *A Dream Deferred*, but does not provide an exact reference.

expand her/his perspective. The full attention offered by the practitioner would also reward the participant for her/his motivation and investment.

Mind the Conflict – General description of the intervention process

Practitioners of the new intervention would be professional psychotherapists who have been trained on psychological barriers to peace within the Israeli-Jewish society, and on general conflict transformation concepts and skills. To begin with practitioners would team up in small groups in order to support each other while the intervention is further developed. Remuneration issues are yet to be discussed.

1. Attitude and mandate of the practitioner

The main role of the practitioner is to provide a safe space for the participant on the one hand and to encourage him/her to examine their beliefs and emotions in regards to the conflict on the other hand. An attitude of focused collaboration and guided discovery[11] should be established – the participant is expected to take responsibility for her/his process of self-investigation, while the practitioner helps to guide and focus the process. Where needed, the practitioner brings the conversation back to the issue of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and to the level of personal responses rather than political positions. Importantly, the aim of the practitioner is not to change, convince or debate with the participant but rather to provide him/her with an accommodating opportunity for change.

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[11] The term *guided discovery* is used in Cognitive Behavioral Therapy to describe the therapeutic process (personal communication, Yasmin Fulder, November 25, 2010).

In general the practitioner aspires to encourage the participant to adopt a wider view of the reality of the conflict and consider new possibilities: moving from features associated with the conflict mindset, such as fear, mistrust, one-sidedness, separateness, dehumanization of the other and stagnation, to attitudes related to the alternative *reconciliation mindset*: legitimacy for all sides, win-win solutions, responsibility, openness, creativity, and hope. While it is not expected that the attitude of the participant would be fully transformed within a few weeks, a number of first steps in this direction can set the participant on a new course in relation to the conflict.

2. Intervention structure – sessions' makeup

The series of one-hour-long sessions of which the intervention is built consists of opening and closing sessions and a main-body of work-sessions in between. This is a process-oriented intervention which mostly relies on practitioners' existing professional skills.

The first session is dedicated for intake and trust building. Asking neutral questions the practitioner invites the participant to describe in what ways the conflict touches upon his or her life. The practitioner listens empathetically and where needed offers additional queries to encourage the continuation of the telling. It is recommended to invite the participant to share about their familial background in the context of the conflict.

The second session begins with asking the participant for her/his observations in relation to the issue since the previous session. The practitioner then offers a few themes which s/he identified during the intake session as prominent in the current perspective of the participant toward the conflict.[12] The participant is invited to choose a starting point

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[12] This step is based on James Mann's *Time Limited Dynamic Psychotherapy* approach (in Shefler, 1993).

which appeals to them and the inquiry process begins. For the rest of this session, as well as during the other main-body sessions, the practitioner and the participant work jointly to discern the latter's patterns of emotion, thought and behavior in response to the conflict. Each session starts with the participant's reflection on the last meeting and other relevant events which occurred during the week. The conversation then continues with previous or new themes. During the process the practitioner can offer to the participant to perform auxiliary tasks, such as reading certain information or recording her/his reactions to a specific experience, e.g. watching the night news.

The last session in the series is set apart for closure. The practitioner invites the participant to reflect on the whole process and indicate new understandings and insights that s/he achieved. The practitioner then offers her/his own reflections, with emphasis on positive reinforcement. Where appropriate they also discuss possible steps for the future. The practitioner can provide for example a short list of peace initiatives which the participant may find appealing.

Chapter 4: Pilot Phase – Findings and Analysis

In intervention research the purpose of the pilot phase is to better understand the mechanisms proposed for the new intervention. In this project, to begin with, the mock-pilot highlighted the importance of two components which were consequently incorporated into the basic format of the intervention: preparedness of the practitioner and self-motivation of the participant. The full pilot test then allowed for a more thorough

examination of the nuts and bolts of the intervention process. This chapter will present the outcomes of the pilot conducted with two participants, followed by an analysis of the conditions and tools that contributed to change.

Findings

The two young men who were chosen to participate in the pilot explicitly indicated their right-wing political inclination prior to the process. One of them was a religious settler who among other pursuits facilitates Jewish values workshops in the military. The other was a secular high-tech employee who voted in the last elections for the right-wing party of Israeli Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman. The two came to the process curious and willing to hear new positions while staying loyal to their own. Each mentioned he would like to better understand himself and where his political decisions and choices stem from.

Both participants reported the process was interesting, beneficial and worthwhile their investment. They achieved clarity in their feelings and positions in relation to the conflict as well as specific insights that helped them feel better about themselves. One of them attested he now appreciates the similarity between the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and conflicts he has in his personal life. He maintained that a change in perception on one of these levels may influence his ability to handle conflicts in other contexts. Changes were reported on the cognitive, emotional and behavioral levels, as well as in attitudes.

1. Emotional changes

The process helped participants translate strong emotions they have in certain situations related to the conflict to the rational level. This enabled them to examine their values and positions and even transform some feelings. One of them who previously experienced

much anger and frustration in political discussions with those holding different positions to his own is now able to accept such difference without losing a sense of closeness. Solving inner conflicts led them to feel more at peace. Gaining clarity and higher ability to express themselves on this topic increased their self-assurance. One of them felt more assured being able to fully express his right-wing positions in front of the practitioner, who represented for him the Israeli Left.

2. Behavioral changes

During the period of the five sessions both participants increased their engagement with the conflict through conversing with friends and family and through reading. For one of them this was a considerable change as in his daily life he does not spare the time for this. One of them developed an ability to listen more patiently while discussing the conflict. In the forth session he tells about a conversation he held a couple of days earlier: "Usually I take a stand... [Now] I wanted to hear what others had to say... You hear more opinions instead of only your own… it was important for me first to listen. It was nice".

3. Cognitive changes

The participants attest to becoming more aware of the conflict and/or of their way of relating to non-mainstream groups in Israeli society. One of them in particular demonstrates a growing mindfulness in real time to emotions, sensations and thoughts about the conflict and "others". Both of them report an increased clarity – better understanding of different components of the conflict and their own positioning and identifications in relation to them. An acquired ability to separate between emotions and positions in regards to the conflict is experienced as beneficial.

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4. Change in attitudes

Some of the positions maintained by participants at the end of the process fall well within the realm of the conflict mindset, such as delegitimization of the other side, fear as justification to Israeli-Jewish aggressiveness, need for unity and patriotism, and adherence to the Jewish narrative on the expense of Palestinians (justification of goals). Still the participants report on change in a range of positions and attitudes:

- A new ability to accept differences in positions as stemming from legitimate subjective worldviews rather than from "wickedness".

- Adopting values of equality and democracy in relation to all groups in society – "I don't want to have second grade citizens in Israel".

- From viewing investment in weak groups in society as "coming on my expense" to looking for creative ways to enable them to be an integral part of society.

- Experiencing of inter-cultural relations as having benefits and not only costs: "A new understanding can evolve from conversing".

- From feeling that Israeli politicians have spent too many years on pointless negotiations with Palestinians to declaring that it is important to elect political leaders that are able to listen, that want to understand the other side, and that are not entrenched in their own positions.

- A better ability to identify generalizations and stereotypes, as well as biased interpretations of current affairs in the media and by politicians.

- Realizing that the ongoing sources of information that feed my worldview are limited and narrow; alternative information sources may loosen my positions.

- Acknowledging that Israel is also responsible to the conflict situation and that some behaviors of the Israeli army are problematic.

- An interest develops to meet Palestinians and better understand their story.

- Understanding that the resolution of the conflict should take the Palestinian narrative into account.

Analysis of intervention mechanisms

The intervention design consists of a few elements. The setting is semi-therapeutic and includes a set number of one-on-one one-hour-long weekly meetings between a practitioner and a participant. The practitioners are expected to have worked on their own automatic reactions to the conflict prior to working with participants, and the latter are expected to be self-motivated to go through such a process. The agenda of the practitioner is to raise the awareness of participants to their attitudes, feelings and behaviors in regards to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and to support their self-inquiry process; it is agreed that this would be the main focus of the sessions. The core professional competencies are empathy and mindfulness-based inquiry.

The analysis of the two pilots aimed to determine whether and how did these elements contribute to the outcomes and to identify any other significant elements. To begin with, it was recognized that the mere availability of such a platform for discussing the conflict was meaningful. The participants commonly do not have discussion-partners for this issue in such depth, or even find it hard to make the time for it themselves.

Dedicating five meetings, including the time before and after, had an important effect. One of them for example, for the first time in his life, wrote down his positions vis-à-vis the conflict prior to the first session. He then kept on adding to the document the new insights and understandings he achieved during the process.

Furthermore, it was evident that both participants did not only invest time and effort in attending the sessions but were proactive throughout the process in promoting their own learning. In addition to conversing with others and reading materials in-between the sessions, their sincerity was also expressed within the sessions. They made an effort to see reality from different angles and voluntarily exposed and acknowledged their own negative or narrow approaches when they became aware of them. They were willing to question their positions. Upon the discovery of a dissonance in their emotions, values or opinions they exerted themselves to find a new logic or a creative solution, which often meant adopting a new approach. Thus their self-motivation amplified the platform: they came to work, not to be worked-on.

The role of empathy, as intended in the intervention design, is to provide a safe environment in which the participant would be able to conduct a productive self-inquiry. The data analysis suggests several facets of empathy which contribute to the process of change. To start with, when practitioners make themselves fully available, participants feel respected and assured. "The whole stage was mine", said one of them, "I felt that this medium was there for me". Not only the topic but also the pace of the conversation was determined according to the participant's needs, helping to create an enabling space. The

participants were able to bring themselves fully and authentically: they could voice confusion, "pour out" all their emotions, or express harsh judgments – all was permitted.

These openness, acceptance and non-judgment allowed the participants to let go of their defensiveness. Even though they knew that the practitioners affiliated with the political Left they felt safe to expose their faults or strongly articulate themselves – each was able to express himself in ways he does not normally do. The anonymity of the practitioner contributed to this sense of safety as well as the fact that "she did not attack nor try to convince me… it felt comfortable". This seems to be a key aspect of the process. Under usual circumstances rightist and leftist Israelis vehemently attack each other. Here the permissive atmosphere allowed the participants not only to express but also to *hear* themselves, leading to significant self-generated realizations: "it is hard to realize that I am a racist"; "you cannot blame the Palestinians for 100% of the situation".

The personal connection formed between the practitioner and the participant also supported the process. A limited self-exposure of the practitioner helped to create mutuality and highlight the humane aspect of the whole process, as if saying, "We are all part of this story". In addition, a sincere interest in the personal story of the participant contributed to a sense of closeness and increased safety. As the process continued the relationship became a laboratory, where participants could experience the value of attentive listening; the ability to contain disagreement without severing a sense of friendliness; and the possibility of creating new understandings across differences. These lived experiences were later projected into real life contexts of dealing with the conflict.

Self-inquiry can be defined as a process wherein a person is able to doubt the truths that direct his or her life.[13] The intervention aspires to provide an opportunity for such an examination in relation to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict: being able to decipher what make up my positions, what are they based on, and where relevant allow change to occur. In the two pilots, after feelings were "poured out" and concerns "floated" the practitioner helped the participant conduct an inquiry by utilizing a number of mechanisms.

Awareness was drawn to the participant's common reactions and behaviors in situations related to the conflict. This led to mindfulness: one of the participants reported a growing ability to be aware of his emotions and thoughts, and even control his behavior, in conversations about the conflict. A process of identification, refinement and naming of feelings, beliefs and positions took place. Once a focal point was discerned it was explored from several different angles, with deeper and deeper inferences being exposed. On several occasions this process led to a dissonance – a root belief which stood in opposition to other core values or beliefs of the participant was exposed. Significantly, as this process was led by the participants themselves they did not object the new realizations they stumbled across; these were the fruits of their own observation rather than an external judgment or blame.

An important mechanism that was identified in this regard was the active employment of silence as part of the conversation. Quiet moments allowed participants to deeply reflect upon their own ideas. These often followed an instance of confrontation, even if gentle, when a leveraging question was put on the table. Gentle confrontation also

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[13] Personal communication, Sandya Bar Kama, October 9, 2011.

took other forms. Practitioners constantly pointed to generalizations and stereotypes, encouraging participants to doubt their taken-for-granted information sources. New information was also presented – in both pilots "suggested readings" were introduced – and helped to expose participants to a wider view of reality.

While many of the above mentioned tools can be used in any inquiry process, two features especially relevant for working with conflict mindsets were identified. First, a useful guideline for this work is a persistent search for, and acceptance of, a multiplicity of voices. Where the participant may be used, and sometimes eager, to jump to conclusions or subscribe to an either/or approach, it is the role of the practitioner to encourage a both/and perspective: there are several voices within you and in the surrounding society. There is no need to instantly have an opinion. You can listen to all of them without being afraid of the results. Second, a sensitive navigation between the personal and the political levels can enhance the inquiry process – an insight regarding conflicts on one level can be projected to the other and lead to further realizations.

Finally, the preparedness of the practitioner supported both the empathy and the inquiry components. The intervention design process enabled practitioners to bring a high level of clarity and focus to the sessions, which enhanced their ability to gently direct the participant's process. On the emotional level, having experienced prior confrontations with right wing Israeli-Jews helped them to prepare themselves to being neutral and empathetic while meeting with the participant. As one of the participants attested, he felt that the practitioner was genuinely interested in him and in his process. Her not being in the room with a strong agenda in regards to his process enabled him to feel safe.

Chapter 5: Summary and Steps Forward

At the conclusion of this phase of the Intervention Design and Development process a basic format of the intervention, including clear guidelines for practitioners, is available for further development and implementation. Evaluation tests should be conducted to determine the effectiveness of the one-on-one intervention vis-à-vis existing Israeli-Palestinian dialogue group methodologies. However, the pilot test has already highlighted possible advantages of the Mind the Conflict model presented here.

The one-on-one setting combined with the empathy extended by the practitioner created a safe environment. Free of the need to protect themselves from criticism and condemnation participants were able first to sort out their strong emotions in regards to the conflict and then examine their beliefs and positions. The double function of the practitioner – supportive and patient presence on the one hand, and mindful confrontation on the other hand – enhanced the inquiry process. The insights originated along the way, put together with the commitment of the participant, generated opportunities for change.
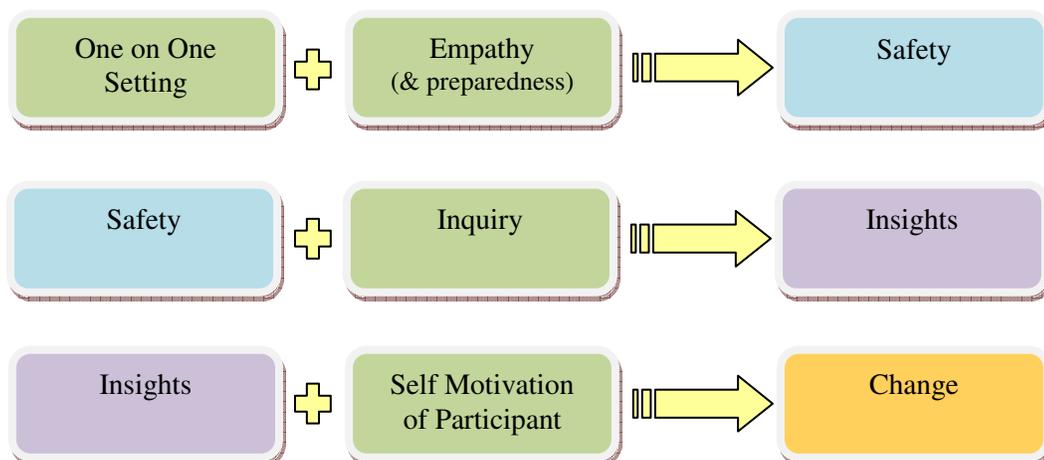
Here is a simple depiction of the intervention's logic:

Figure 1: Building blocks of the Mind the Conflict model

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As indicated previously the purpose of the pilot test was to clarify the building blocks of the intervention rather than to measure its outcomes or impact. Still, the pilot demonstrated the potential of the intervention in somewhat alleviating psychological obstacles to peace amongst Israeli-Jews. Becoming aware of some of their emotional, cognitive and behavioral automatic responses participants were able to accept new information and approach the conflict, or factors related to it, with fresh eyes. The safety and inclusiveness created in the process counteracted, at least to some degree, the hurdles of defensiveness and resistance to change.

A few questions that were raised during the pilot phase are to be explored while further developing this model. First, the needs of left-leaning Israeli-Jews within such a process should be considered; for example, the need to overcome helplessness. Hypothetically the model could encourage such people to find a new sense of hope and become involved in peacework. Such a desired outcome would of course multiply the influence of the intervention. Second, the intervention could be improved by borrowing specific features from short-term psychotherapy approaches (both CBT and dynamic). Third, the number of sessions in the process is to be reconsidered. While the short time span helped both practitioners and participants maintain a strong focus throughout the process, two or three more sessions could probably lead to even better outcomes in terms of exposure to additional conflict issues. Related to that, the fourth consideration is whether specific subject matters should be contended with during the process. It is suggested that most Israeli-Jews would benefit from raising their awareness to three issues: fear, moral justification, and de-legitimization of Palestinians. However, the

practitioner could only point to such issues after the participant has dealt with his/her most urgent concerns, which may require more than five sessions. Finally, an appropriate practitioner training is to be developed.

The *Mind the Conflict* model could potentially provide an additional channel for processing Israeli-Jewish attitudes and assumptions in relation to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It is anticipated that quite a few Israeli-Jewish psychotherapists would appreciate an opportunity to contribute to peacebuilding while using their professional skills. In the same manner by which personal coaching has recently become very fashionable in Israel, suitable professional and institutional investment could turn one-on-one work with conflict related attitudes into a conventional practice. Any Israeli-Jew, like the two pilot participants, would be able to take advantage of this new service for his/her own benefit.

Furthermore, the model can be utilized to enhance intergroup dialogue. Prior and during the group process facilitators could offer individual sessions to participants in order to help them better understand and articulate themselves vis-à-vis the group process. Overcoming some obstacles in private could possibly improve communication on the group level. Looking further ahead, other professionals who could potentially be trained to use this model are school teachers – who could apply it with their students, and lobbyists and peace activists – who could benefit from using empathy and inquiry skills in their political activities. A similar tactic to working with decision-makers has already been proposed by the Oxford Research Group (Bloomfield, Houldsworth & Smith, 2007).

To carry this vision forward, the next step in this project would be to approach relevant Israeli organizations and institutions that may be interested in supporting it.

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