

PSYCHOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF RECONCILIATION

Michael Striebel

ABSTRACT

Reconciliation cannot occur until victims move through 4 stages of grief work – defense, anger, breakdown, regression, and adaptation. One must concede the truth of themselves, the conflict situation and give some sign of this understanding for reconciliation to occur. A good relationship to oneself; others, God and nature is necessary to release the energy necessary for peace work. A second necessary attitude is belief in the equality of all people. With these beliefs, one is able to move from grief work to conflict resolution.

Reconciliation can be defined as a process in which two or more people or parties revise mainly their behavior and partially their negative thinking and feeling concerning the other to come to a new form of coexistence. I address individuals facing the direct or indirect consequences of armed conflicts although most of what is said applies to other types of conflicts such as marital or family disputes. I will not deal with reconciliation and politics, economics, military, power distribution among groups, mass convictions, and inter-religious conflicts.

In early 1994 I watched television and heard about a massacre at some place in former Yugoslavia. The following things happened within me:

I suddenly felt a rage coming over me like a giant wave. I wanted an immediate bombing of the capital of the state I thought was responsible for that massacre. Innocent people might live in the capital, but, in my rage, I viewed them guilty of passivity. Alternatives that occurred to me were launching of a missile to the president's residence, shooting of the president, or arresting him and trying him in an international court.

I was frightened of those fantasies.

I admitted that it was me who thought of all this.

I was very glad that I had no weapon. Fortunately, there was no way to set my first fantasy into action. For a short moment, a further fantasy came into my mind: how would it be, if there were no weapons at all in the whole wide world?

I was very happy to see that my wish was only a fantasy and that most probably I would not have launched a missile, even if I had one.

There were other feelings. I felt a deep connection with the victims of that massacre and, for a moment, I wished I could be with them, helping in some way. Then I realized that I would not know how to help effectively.

I also felt, to my surprise, pity for the aggressors. How miserable must men feel to commit such cruelties? What kind of education must they have had to be able to do so? In what political circumstances, terror, propaganda and oppression were they living? I would have liked to talk to them about their real needs, their internal wishes, and desires.

I got confused about feeling pity for both sides. Although I am not schizophrenic, I heard voices like taped sentences in my mind: *"Your language be Yes, yes or No, no! All other is evil?" "Who is not for me, is against me!" "Always define who is the aggressor and who is the victim, then always stay with the victim because he needs you more than the aggressor!"* Then there were others like, *"The really poor guys are the aggressor! They are the ones who are even more in need."*

A few days after this event, I heard about another massacre committed by soldiers of the opponent state. This enhanced my confusion and made me think that if there is a distinction between aggressors and victims; it is certainly not between the citizens of one republic or another but within different parts of their

respective populations. I also wondered if all people are victims, some just more than the others?

I still wanted to take some action, but several thoughts prevented me from doing so. First, I live hundreds of kilometers away from the conflict area. Second, I believe that everybody has the right to solve conflicts on his or her own. Third, I heard myself saying, "You should keep out of an area in which former generations of your country caused a lot of trouble. They may have contributed indirectly to the difficulties that are seen nowadays."

This paper deals with the psychological conditions that must be fulfilled to bring about individual and collective reconciliation. The process has to progress in a certain order, first enabling individual and collective mourning, then building up certain attitudes as preconditions of conflict resolution, and only then utilizing conflict resolution techniques.

INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE GRIEF WORK

Most experiences in war consist in the loss of ideas (e.g. hope), of persons (e.g. relatives), or things (e.g. houses, properties). Mourning, sometimes named grief work, follows the loss. Yorick Spiegel (1986) described four stages of mourning necessary for resumption of a normal life: (1) defense, (2) anger, (3) breakdown and regression, and (4) adaptation.

When a person hears or experiences something painful, their reaction is often, "This cannot be true! I do not believe it!" This is called a defense reaction and is normal. Unfortunately some people get stuck in this reaction pattern. They never look really close at what happened. However, when they can admit that the loss did take place, they are ready to move to the next stage of grief work.

The second step in grief work is anger. The anger reaction is widely known and most probably genetic. This reaction can be misused by people in power to bring victims to fight back although the damage cannot be reversed. A spiral of growing violence occurs when anger is used by both parties in a conflict. When one sees that anger does not solve the damage, the next stage, breakdown and regression begins.

The breakdown stage might be short or last for several weeks. The person - depending on how severe the loss, their culture, and their education - might live totally drawn-back, might act out by screaming, and might need others to hold her or him. Often victims in this stage are confused. They see no possible future for themselves, and may think about suicide. New important decisions should not be made in this stage. Most cultures have special rites to help people to undergo this stage.

As the four phases are successfully finished, a person may come to a state in which his or her mood is still going up and down, but gradually normalizes

towards a clear mind. Decisions needed for the life after the loss can now be made. Helpers enable people to pass through all these phases and to not to get stuck in one of them. Without this work no victim will come to a stage in which attitudes necessary for reconciliation can occur.

ATTITUDES AS PRECONDITIONS OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION

To try to see the truth in every situation is a positive sign that the person is ready to do something new that might lead to a conflict resolution. As long as she or he does not want to learn the truth, you should go back to the unfulfilled needs. Religion may interfere by telling the person what he or she should feel or think. The person may be afraid of his own thoughts, but it is very important to see the difference between fantasy and action. We are responsible for our actions but only partially responsible for our fantasies.

First look at self and learn something about you. It is easy to acknowledge things or behaviors you know already. But to see the dark side of self is more important. The reflections I gave in the introduction illustrate trying to see the truth within oneself. I am the only one who can judge whether this really happened within me. Staying with one's own truth is one of the first important steps in conflict resolution.

External truth is often easier because often it can be proved by documents or witnesses. External truth is a matter of historical research. There maybe

difficulty with permission to publish and openly discuss historical research but this is necessary to bring to light conflict in all its nuances. Sound reconciliation is never based on forgetting. Intentional forgetting seldom succeeds and usually leads to the opposite: what you want to forget never leaves your mind. "What we resist, persists" (Parry, 1991).

If it's not forgetting, what then? Excusing? Forgiving? Facing the truth of what one did almost automatically leads to a response by self: an open excuse, a public or private gesture, or whatever is appropriate to the situation in which reconciliation is needed as a foundation for living side by side. Of course one cannot be sure that such a gesture is always understood. That is the risk of every communication. But it is better to take this risk than to do nothing. You can always try to understand the situation of the other.

Spirituality (German: Weltanschauung) as a way to look at the world puts values onto persons, things, and events. It must meet two minimum requirements to be useful for reconciliation. First, it must deliver the energy to pursue the way of peace, a good relationship to oneself, others, God and nature. Second, it must stress the equality of all men and women (or even better, strengthen the values of everything that naturally exists on earth.) All religions foster peace as a prominent part of their belief system. Unfortunately most religions, especially the monotheistic ones, also have parts which tolerate forms of violence in their theory and/or in their practice. So one must check whether a religion meets the

two criteria. If it does not you can either go deeper into a certain religious system and search for its peace tradition - or look for a new really peaceful religion.

There are also other ways to look at and interpret the world that motivate people for reconciliation and peace work. These include:

- * human rights groups (e.g. Amnesty International, Helsinki Citizen Committee)
- * the peace movement itself (e.g. International Fellowship of Reconciliation, Peace Brigades, Pax Christi International)
- * organizations for protection of the environment¹ (e.g. Greenpeace, Robin Wood, World Wildlife Fund, Findhorn Community, Holyearth Foundation, Worldwatch Institute)

The same two criteria must be applied to these organizations to find out whether they further or hinder the wish to contribute to a peaceful world.

Every Weltanschauung needs to be cultivated. The usual means to do so is a group of persons sharing the same ideas. This is a crucial point for persistence in peace work. Only very seldom is someone able to live his or her spirituality over a long period by simply reading books, meditating alone, and so forth.

¹ It would be better to talk about co-world instead of environment. Environment defines the outer world from an individualistic viewpoint as, the-world-around-me. Co-world would stress the fact that I am only a part of the whole world.

Self assurance is the opposite of fear. Since fear is one of the most prominent sources of unnecessary aggression, self assurance is a most desirable attitude in peace work. But, how to get it? There are many educational concepts, training programs for all ages, and therapeutic approaches, directed towards self-confidence and assertiveness. Helpers in the peace movement may draw from those traditions. Most religions also have ways to foster self-confidence but often they are not taught with primary emphasis. In Christian teachings, for example, assertiveness is sometimes seen as interfering with modesty and therefore not really cherished.

The psychological approach to self-confidence is conceived as something lacking in a person's personality. Therefore, you must *add* something (self-confidence). Spiritually, you can achieve self-confidence by very different ways. You might stress that all is in God's hands and that therefore you can be assured that nothing harmful can happen. Or you might stress the fact that your own Ego is not so important, so nothing really can harm it.

The old way, that of setting up and following some charismatic leader and giving our power away to him or her, then blaming them for our faults, was no longer appropriate. There is a new way pushing on us, a way that is congruent with our evolution into the 21st century. That new way is for you and me and thousands of us

to free the Gandhi that lives within our own heart. That new way is to find the courage to unlock the Martin Luther King inside each of us; to give birth to the Mother Theresa that is in each of our beings and to live that consciousness in our daily lives. (Parry, 1991, p. 17)

CONFLICT RESOLUTION TECHNIQUES

You can step to the techniques of conflict resolution only after having left the stages of grief and after having built up these attitudes. Techniques of conflict resolution have been published including:

- * Rosenberg's nonviolent communication (1983)
- * Parry's *Warriors of the Heart* (1991)
- * Fisher and Ury's negotiating technique (1981)
- * Gandhi's principles (Galtung, 1987)
- * Hildegard Goos-Mayr's nonviolent liberation (1989)
- * Gordon's conferences without losers (1989)
- * Bach and Wyden's work with dyades of persons (1983)

These approaches to conflict resolution appear in different looking packages. Some are very technical with almost no mention of underlying beliefs and values (Fisher and Ury, 1981; Rosenberg, 1983; Gordon books). They provide clear advice about what to do and are very practical, like good recipe books. Despite their highly practical value, they often miss crucial points in conflict resolution

like, How can you give warm understanding to someone else in the midst of a conflict when you are enraged yourself? Or what use, of what kind of power meets the criteria of responsibility for others or for the equality of people? What do I do, when conflict partners cannot or do not want to talk? How do I get the inner energy to pursue the way of peace in a hostile environment?

Other authors discuss the spiritual or religious back ground spiritually or religion of their approach, often stressing the prevalence of the development of internal attitudes over external behavior changes. They may suggest a way of living and believing (Galtung, 1987; Goos-Mayr, 1989; Parry, 1991). People who have a certain antipathy against one of the spiritualities, religions, or ways of living often find it hard to profit from those books.

The main tasks to be mastered by conflict resolution techniques are:

- * getting along with myself in a conflict situation,
- * understanding others, and
- * making myself understood.

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