Unit II
Is Listening Ever Wrong?

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LISTENING IS THE BEGINNING OF PEACE

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LISTENING IS THE BEGINNING OF PEACE

Elise Boulding, a revered founder of the Peace Studies movement, once said that if she were required to sum up peacemaking in just one word, that word would be listening. The centrality of listening in efforts toward coexistence and reconciliation can hardly be overstated. Without the capacity to listen, a person’s effectiveness as a peacemaker is severely compromised. Nearly all interventions to resolve violent conflicts require listening on the part of intermediaries and adversaries alike — if not as the very first activity, then as soon as the situation is safe enough for conversation.

However, when asked to discuss ethical questions and dilemmas many peacebuilders speak of tensions surrounding the imperative to listen.

Sometimes these tensions emerge only in retrospect. For instance, it seemed obvious to one Bosnian peacebuilder that listening to refugees and victims of violence speak about their suffering was, without question, necessary. After two years spent listening to stories of abuse and loss, however, she discovered that she was unable to talk about anything else. She found that her internal responses became inappropriate. If a refugee whose family remained intact told of stories of horrible fears and the confusion of displacement, she would think to herself, “So what? I’ve heard worse than this.” Finally, when she could listen no more, she had to leave her job in the women’s center. Her story makes it clear that listening can have a profound effect — sometimes a profoundly negative effect — on the listener. For professionals who place the act of listening at the core of our work, this story raises questions about the constraints we should place on our sense of responsibility to listen. It asks us to confront the question of how to balance caring for ourselves with listening to others.

Sometimes tensions about listening emerge in the process of facilitating coexistence encounters directly. A Palestinian Israeli coexistence worker wondered aloud whether Palestinian young people living under occupation should be asked to listen empathetically to Israeli young people who, in just a few years, would join the occupying army. If Palestinian young people begin to empathize with Israelis, may that very empathy diminish their capacity to resist occupation? Perhaps the Palestinian children need their anger more than they need to understand. Should they be encouraged to listen to the “other side” if that listening could lessen their will to struggle?

Sometimes the tensions people experience as a result of listening to the other are bound up not only in a decision to listen, but also in a related decision to refrain from speaking. A Sinhalese Sri Lankan peacebuilder discovered that after listening non-judgmentally to Tamil colleagues he began to understand aspects of the conflict from the Tamil point of view. He began to understand why Tamils condoned certain actions that he had originally perceived to be ethically wrong. As he explained his newfound insights to members of his family, however, he discovered that he had lost his own sense of right and wrong.

“Sometimes too much listening — or the wrong kind of listening, or listening in the absence of speaking — can lead us to be uncertain about our own values. In some cases, such uncertainties are themselves helpful, since they open space for new thinking. Nevertheless, if after listening empathetically to our adversaries we discover ourselves taking positions that conflict with our own core values, we might violate our own sense of integrity.”
So this is another kind of ethical difficulty that can emerge from the imperative to listen: sometimes too much listening — or the wrong kind of listening, or listening in the absence of speaking — can lead us to be uncertain about our own values. In some cases, such uncertainties are themselves helpful, since they open space for new thinking. Nevertheless, if after listening empathetically to our adversaries we discover ourselves taking positions that conflict with our own core values, we might violate our own sense of integrity. If we find ourselves, especially without awareness, having relinquished or compromised values we have held as central, perhaps we have listened too much, or too openly or too silently. When does our desire to listen to an adversary, to understand the point of view of our adversary, simply become too much to ask of ourselves? How do we weigh the ethical benefits of listening — the respect it might communicate, the understanding it might facilitate — with its ethical costs? These questions are especially important for peacebuilders who are also members of the communities in conflict.

The questions that have been raised in this introduction will be explored in much greater depth as we proceed through this unit. In subsequent chapters, we will consider the questions, tensions and dilemmas practitioners face as they live and work within the profession’s imperative to listen. In these sections, we will bring the resources of moral philosophy — concepts, modes of inquiry, kinds of questions — to bear on the concerns raised by practitioners. We will see if the academic discipline can help us. After engaging in ethical inquiry into the concepts, assumptions, questions, tensions, challenges and dilemmas articulated by practitioners, are we any clearer about what course of action would be best? Are we clearer at least about the issues to be resolved?

The balance of the present chapter returns us to the ethical possibilities inherent in listening. It is a reminder of why listening is so highly valued in peacebuilding theory and practice.

Peacemakers know that listening is important — both for adversaries who have become alienated from each other and for the intermediaries who intervene in hopes of furthering coexistence and reconciliation. For peacebuilders from both inside and outside of the conflict region, listening is a form of action that seems, at least in comparison to other possible forms of intervention, unlikely to cause harm.

Listening is an activity that can have different significance depending on the qualities of presence the listener brings to the endeavor. The impact of listening depends in large measure on whether one listens openly or judgmentally, believably or skeptically, reluctantly or enthusiastically, hostilely or reverently, superficially or inquisitively. It is possible to listen merely for information, or more deeply, seeking to understand the feelings that surround words
and infuse them with meaning. It is possible to listen not only to what is expressed overtly, but also to the silences, for what is left unspoken.

Questions about whether, how and when to listen are, by definition, ethical questions. They fall into the ethical domain because they are, as the philosopher Anthony Weston has said, questions about “the needs and legitimate expectations of others as well as ourselves.”

The act of listening — whether and by whom it is undertaken, and in what spirit — can have different significance for the one who is heard, for the listener, and for the relationship between them. Before we embark on confronting and exploring the ethical tensions and difficulties listening has created for peacebuilding practitioners, it makes sense to remind ourselves of why such a high value has been placed on the act of listening by peacebuilding theorists and practitioners in the first place.
Potential Effects on the One Who is Heard

To be listened to — especially to be received with caring and respectful attention, but even just to be heard by someone who seeks to understand — can be a profound experience for the person who speaks. In the context of a violent conflict, where people often feel both disregarded personally and violated as members of their groups, being listened to by an adversary or by an international intermediary can be an important signal of respect. Listening represents an invitation into a human community — into a fellowship of communication, of deliberation, of meaning making. It is an invitation that stands in sharp contrast to the dehumanization of violence. If the listener seeks to understand the speaker — not just the meaning of the words, but the speaker’s worldview, her narrative, his opinions — then the listening in itself becomes an act of respect. We respect people in part when we choose to try to perceive them as they perceive themselves, not in terms of our own projects and ambitions (as means to our ends), but as persons who have desires, goals and projects of their own.

Sensitive, patient and engaged listening can sometimes help victims of trauma to begin the process of recovery. It can encourage those who are reluctant or terrified to speak and can help others to create or re-create language that is adequate to communicate their most life-shattering experiences. According to the psychoanalyst and Holocaust documentor Dori Laub, traumas, like extreme physical pain, can defy language because events, although real, took place outside of the normal categories of experience that allow them to be linked with other experiences, comprehended and recounted. Laub explains the ambivalence that survivors feel about bearing witness to their experience in this way.

The trauma survivor profoundly fears such knowledge, shrinks away from it and is apt to close off at any moment, when facing it...Such knowledge dissolves all barriers, breaks all boundaries of time and place, of self and subjectivity...Speakers about trauma on some level prefer silence so as to protect themselves from the fear of being listened to — and of listening to themselves...While silence is defeat, it serves them both as a sanctuary and as a place of bondage. Silence is for them a fated exile, yet also a home, a destination, and a binding oath. To not return from this silence is the rule rather than the exception...

Laub writes that the person who listens to the testimony of trauma survivors

...must listen to and hear the silence...He or she must recognize, acknowledge and address that silence, even if this simply means respect — and knowing how to wait... There must be an abundance of holding and emotional investment in the encounter, to keep alive the witnessing narration; otherwise the whole experience of testimony can end up in silence, in complete withholding. Paradoxically enough, the interviewer has to be, thus, both unobtrusive, nondirective, and yet imminently present, active, in the lead.
Active listening also has been used by peacebuilders as a strategy that allows for speakers to transform themselves. For instance, in The Listening Project, a Buddhist-inspired antiracism project in rural North Carolina, an activist described the following experience.

*Active listening allows a greater truth to emerge. I remember listening to one woman who was being surveyed about the relationship between racism and poverty. She started off by calling Blacks inferior. I didn’t judge her or react to her. I asked her to comment on the fact that many Blacks are highly respected doctors, lawyers and professors. This led her to talk about the importance of education, and we soon began talking about the effects of slavery and unequal opportunity. Eventually she disagreed with her own statement of Black inferiority and ended by acknowledging a need in the United States to make equal opportunity for education a national priority. This transformation was possible only because my listening made her feel safe to risk examining her ideas on race, perhaps for the first time in her life.*

For people living in the context of violent conflict, and for those who are still recovering from the effects of violence, being listened to can be an antidote to the dehumanization they have experienced; it can signal an invitation to re-enter a human community. It can be a sign of respect, and it can actually represent an instance of being respected. For those recovering from trauma, listening can be the key that unlocks silent memories, that allows for the expression that is the hallmark of the beginning of healing. For those who carry stereotypes and hatreds, listening itself sometimes affords the opportunity for self-reflection that can lead to insight and transformation.

Violence can be understood to include acts, policies, structures, words, silences and omissions that are designed to diminish the agency (i.e., the capacity to act) of the targeted person or group. Listening — to show respect, to understand, to heal or to facilitate transformation — can restore the capacity for agency for the one who has been heard. Respectful listening from an adversary or an intermediary may be a small step towards peace, but it is a step in the right direction: reversing a cycle of violence.

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Potential Effects on the Listener

For the listener, listening can be demanding and sometimes even harmful. But it can also have many salutary effects. Most important, listening makes possible understanding — understanding of the experience of others, of their attitudes and values, of the narrative that informs others’ interpretation of events. Through listening, we can come to understand not only what our counterparts say — we can begin to imagine the needs and interests that inform the positions they assert. If our listening is deemed sincere by those who speak, we can learn a great deal about our conversation partners: about their vulnerabilities, about how they perceive us and others, about their reflections on their own past actions.

Listeners can choose to use their understanding for a variety of purposes. They can use insights about an adversary’s vulnerabilities either selfishly, to their own advantage, or mutualistically, to make future efforts at coexistence and reconciliation more effective. By itself, listening is no guarantee that the listener will make wise or good choices. But effective action toward peace, no matter how well intentioned, almost always requires the kind of understanding that can only emerge as people reveal themselves to an open, non-judgmental, engaged listener.

Developing a habit of listening has other beneficial effects for the listener as well. Listening can slow us down, restrain us from making a quick (but unstudied and perhaps reactive) response. An attitude of listening — of receptivity to the world as it is — can nourish a quality of inner peace. Many spiritual leaders teach listening as a kind of ‘practice’ — and encourage us to turn the receptive, non-judgmental quality of listening we bring to others to the messages of our own bodies and spirits. “When we can ‘listen’ to the body for longer and longer periods,” writes the Buddhist teacher Charlotte Joko Beck, “our lives will transform in the direction of peace, freedom and happiness.”
Potential Effects on Conflict-habituated Systems

Of course not all listening achieves or even aspires to spiritual attunement and union. However, even more mundane kinds of listening — such as focused listening with a sincere attempt to understand someone with whom one disagrees, or listening with a willingness to empathize with the suffering of another — are rare enough in contexts of intractable violent conflict. A “conflict-habituated” system is usually characterized by a deficit in the capacity of its members to listen to each other, especially given the high number of people likely to have been traumatized by upheavals and acts of violence.

Groups that have suffered repeated victimization become seemingly incapable of empathizing with the suffering of another group, according to the American Psychiatric Association’s Task Force and Committee on Psychiatry and Foreign Affairs. Analogous to the narcissism of individuals who can attend only to their own needs, members of victimized groups seem to “have little capacity to grieve for the hurts of other peoples, or to take responsibilities for the new victims created by their warlike actions.” The professor of psychiatry John Mack says that, to break the cycle:

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... a fundamental attitude of healing or transcending conflict must be present in the third party conciliators, who must constantly have their own ethno-nationalist pain and identifications well in hand... All sides must do a great deal of listening to the telling of history, especially of each group’s hurts and its version of where responsibility has lain. Little by little, acknowledgment of the victim experience of another group can occur, first by the third party conciliators, and finally, by the adversaries themselves in relation to each other. In this way bonds can be forged between groups, so that they can begin to substitute mutual empathy for the egoism of victimization.

In Mack’s view, then, one of the key roles of peacebuilders is to listen — and through listening to enhance the capacities of the adversaries themselves to listen to each other. Why is it so difficult for adversaries to listen to each other? An explanation is offered by political psychologists who theorize that children’s sense of ethnic or national identity is created in part through the “externalization” of pleasurable and wholly good impulses onto symbols of the ingroup. In a parallel process, unpleasurable phenomena, or impulses labeled as ‘bad’ are attached to symbols associated with the other, and, in particular, with the enemy. Vamik Volkan, past president of the International Society of Political Psychology, writes that “since our enemies serve as a reservoir of our unconscious selves, they are unconsciously seen to some extent as being like us, although on a conscious level they should not seem like us since they contain our unwanted aspects—those characteristics we vigorously reject.” Images enemies hold of one another are often mirror images; “each side attributes the same virtues to itself and vices to its enemy.”

Because our impressions of our enemy are at least in part determined by our own projections, to actually listen to an enemy (i.e. to come to know her on her own terms) threatens
to confront us with those aspects of ourselves we wish most passionately to hold at a distance. Furthermore, our own group’s self-definition is “often achieved in opposition to the enemy... [and] intragroup stability is often purchased through intergroup hostility.” If, as psychoanalytic theorists of conflict assert, enemies become receptacles for the projection of negatively valued attributes of ourselves, to perceive our enemy more completely does entail coming to know ourselves as well. The psychological anthropologist Howard Stein writes:

*Transcendence of group-isms can only be accomplished, and always incompletely, as we are able to relinquish and integrate the inner splits between “goodness” and “badness” that have led us throughout history to dichotomize between idealized and disparaged groups.... Only by grieving over our own imperfectability and mortality, can we begin to permit ourselves and others to be ambivalently, more fully, “human all too human,” and not people the social and supernatural world with saints and demons. Liberation begins with an understanding of what we need and use our indispensable enemies for.*

So listening receptively to the stories and experiences of our adversaries almost always helps us to understand more about ourselves. In these cases, the understandings of ourselves and of the objects of our perception are reciprocally informed. The more we truly understand, or the more clearly we perceive, the other (an enemy, let’s say) the more we come to understand and the more clearly we perceive ourselves. Conversely, the deeper our awareness of our own thoughts and feelings, the more clearly will we understand the other. This is true in part because we tend to project onto our enemies characteristics that are part of us but are deemed unacceptable. When we listen to the enemy, we are partly listening to the echoes of our own fear, self-doubt and shame.

Listening — especially empathic listening between adversaries — is central to the transformation of a conflict-habituated system into a community moving toward reconciliation and peace. A minimal kind of coexistence may be achieved through respectful (albeit somewhat detached) listening, a listening designed to communicate respect and the other’s right to have an opinion. More robust relationships between adversaries — relationships of reconciliation or conflict transformation — require empathic listening, a quality of compassionate presence that can help to heal trauma and transform perceptions of the other and oneself.

For all of the reasons outlined in this chapter, peacebuilding theorists and practitioners have come to value listening very highly. It can nourish a sense of respect, and help heal trauma and transform misapprehensions. It can help those who listen to understand both themselves and their adversaries. Sometimes listening can nourish inner peace in both listeners and those who have been heard. Finally, listening can be key to transforming conflict-habituated systems — as adversaries see both themselves and each other more clearly, grieve together for all of their losses, and plan for the future based on understanding their own and each other’s needs.
When Listening Presents Problems

Listening holds a prominent place in the theory and practice of peacebuilding, coexistence and reconciliation. Given the potential for good that accompanies the act of listening, it is no surprise that reservations about listening create uneasy feelings within peacebuilders. Our doubts about listening are experienced against a backdrop of praise for it within our field.

Yet coexistence and reconciliation practitioners have told us stories about a number of different scenarios in which listening has presented ethical questions and challenges. People from oppressed communities recounted feelings of violation when they had been asked to listen to the feelings and experiences of people from the oppressing communities. Refugee workers told of becoming completely depleted after listening to stories of suffering continuously for months or years. Peacebuilders who are also members of adversary communities reported moments when they were listening so intently to their counterparts that they lost a sense of their own ethical grounding.

Before we move on to consider their stories and the questions that emerge from them, take a few moments to think back over your own experiences of listening. Have there been times when you felt torn between an imperative to listen and a sense that the obligation was not fair or was hurtful in some way?
Experiences of Listening and Being Heard

1. What have been your most powerful experiences as a listener?

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2. Have there been moments when being listened to well (or not so well) was significant for you?
3. Have there been times when you felt unable to listen, even though it might have been helpful to others and useful in promoting coexistence or reconciliation?

4. Have there been times when you felt torn between an imperative to listen and a sense that the obligation was not fair or was hurtful in some way?

Louise Diamond’s words on the significance of listening can be found in “Peacemakers in a War Zone: Occasional Paper #1,” published by the Institute for Multitrack Diplomacy in 1993. The quotation begins on page 7.

Dori Laub’s insightful comments on the importance of being listened to for survivors of trauma can be found in the book *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History*, published by Routledge in 1992. Citations are from pages 58, 59 and 71.

Herb Walters’ description of a transformative experience of listening can be found in *The Mindfulness Bell*, a newsletter associated with Thich Nhat Hanh’s sangha, in the August 1993 edition on page 24.

Works by Mack, Volkan, and Stein can all be found in the *Psychodynamics of International Relations, Volume I: Concepts and Theories*, published by Lexington Books, D.C. Heath and Company in 1990. The citation from Mack is from an essay entitled, “The Psychodynamics of Victimization among National Groups in Conflict,” and can be found on page 126.
A note to readers:
This resource listing will be updated regularly on the website of The International Center for Ethics, Justice and Public Life http://www.brandeis.edu/ethics. We welcome suggestions from discussion leaders and users of the guidebook.

Philosophical Texts


Peacebuilding, Coexistence and Conflict Resolution Texts


Literary Works


Websites

- The Compassionate Listening Project was initiated in 1997 to invite regular citizens to play a greater role in Israeli-Palestinian reconciliation: http://www.mideastdiplomacy.org/clp.html. Essays and articles on compassionate listening and reconciliation are available through the project online at http://www.coopcomm.org/listening.htm.

- The Institute for Multi-Track Diplomacy was established in 1992 to promote peacebuilding and to facilitate the transformation of social conflict: http://www.imtd.org.

- Teachings of Thich Nhat Hanh and related websites can be found through the Washington (DC) Mindfulness Community: http://mindfulnesdc.org.
Note: Except for introductory students, this chapter is intended as an affirmation of participants’ and readers’ existing knowledge and values about listening. It is intended, in part, to preempt resistance that people might feel in the following chapters, in which the limitations of listening are to be explored in some depth. This is not intended as an opportunity for building listening skills, except insofar as focused listening is as important to ethical inquiry as it is to peacebuilding. If leaders or instructors wish to use this as an opportunity to enhance participants’ listening skills, additional activities and exercises from other sources may be incorporated at this time.

Use the additional readings to introduce discussions of personal experiences with three levels of listening:

- Intrapersonal listening (from Siddhartha, by Herman Hesse)
- Interpersonal listening ("Listening Within the Family," Dorit’s story)
- Intercommunal listening ("Listening and Dialogue in Sri Lanka," Sanath’s story)

Have participants interview each other in pairs about their answers to the questions raised in the worksheets and the boxes in the chapter. Prepare them for this by explaining how an interview is different from a conversation. As them to stay in their roles as interviewer and interviewee for a designated period of time, from 20 minutes to an hour in each role, depending on the time available. When the interviewing is complete, ask participants to talk first about their experiences of listening and being listened to during the interview.
Listening Within the Family

Let me tell you a story about the power of nonviolent communication that comes from my own family. I came home once at 7 p.m. after a long and frustrating day. I was very tired and tense, but I had to leave at 7:20 to lead a workshop. In 20 minutes I needed to change my clothes, maybe take a shower, prepare supper for the kids, see that everything's OK with them, prepare my notes for the workshop, and then run.

When I came in, I saw everything upside down: friends over, TV on, music of three different kinds, radio shouting, piles of laundry in the living room. I looked at all this mess and went straight into the yard, where there were the remains of our sukkah. I sat there trying to have some quiet and to focus on what seemed to be the most urgent thing, and started to write my notes. Suddenly I realized my daughter was standing near me. She was silent, just standing there, so I raised my eyes to her and asked: “Do you need anything sweetie?” She was still silent, so I looked up again, and I noticed her very sad face. I waited a little, and then she said: “You’re going again!”

Now, my first impulse was to explain, justify, tell her it’s not so bad, and so on, because I felt guilty and ashamed, leaving my children like this, for the whole day. But I was lucky, because my energy was focused on compassion and being with the other, since the notes I was writing were about nonviolent communication. I remembered that — especially in times of hurry and tension — using it, trusting it, will be the quickest way to resolve the situation.

So I asked my daughter, “Are you sad because you would have liked me to stay home and be with you this evening?” Although she was still silent, I could see two tears running down her cheeks. I got the answer. She did want me to stay with her that evening. I waited a little longer to see if she wanted to say more, willing to stay with her feelings and needs of that moment. After a while I said, “Is there anything else you want to tell me about it?” She stayed silent and the tears were still running down her cheeks. Then I said: “Listen, sweetie, because I am in such a hurry, I will go back to writing my notes now. But I want you to know that I really want to listen to you if you want me to. So, if you want to say anything more, please give me a sign and I will stop and I will listen, OK?” She nodded.

I went back to my notes. After a few moments of silence I noticed her going to the sukkah’s walls and taking down the decorations that needed to be taken down. I raised my eyes to her, still writing my notes, and said: “I see that you are getting this in order.” And she said, “Yes, Mommy. There are some things here we need to throw away, and some things I want to keep for next year, so I am putting everything in order.” And I said, “Wonderful, I’m so happy you are doing that, because it needs to be
done.” When I finished my notes and stood up gathering my books and papers, she came and gave me a big hug. She kissed me and said, “Mommy, good luck in your lecture.”

Thinking of that episode, I realize that what she really needed at that particular moment was my presence with her. A presence with another person can be very significant and strong, regardless of its length, if we put all our attention, heart and will on trying to understand one’s feeling and needs at the moment. When I asked her “Are you sad because you would have liked me to stay home?” – this was the moment of being present with her, because I didn’t explain anything to her, didn’t judge her, didn’t blame her, and I didn’t blame myself either. I was meeting her needs by being with her. That helped her to reconnect herself with her own inner power. She became cheerful, having the energy to do something beneficial for the home, for the family and for me. It also reconnected me to my own inner strength and confidence, and really moved me. That evening in my workshop I felt powerful and energized to share with others my confidence and trust in this process.

Dorit, a Jewish Israeli peacebuilder
Listening and Dialogue in Sri Lanka

Here is an example of what can happen in efforts at dialogue. The Peace Council organized a trip and we were able to get our local government officials in the South to meet local government officials, elected ones, in the Tamil areas in the East.

Our group from the South were full of enthusiasm that they were going on a peace mission. So at one of the first meetings, one of them said, “Now we have come to discuss peace with you.” One of the Tamils snapped back, “Before you talk of peace with us and what we can do for peace, we want our rights.” And he said it in a fairly angry way.

The people from the South were very taken aback because they saw that the reception was not so good for them. The Tamils saw them as tourists in the sense that they were coming to have a look and also that they have not suffered. The Tamils are the ones who are suffering.

So, the Sinhalese politicians met after that session which had gone a bit badly. They met amongst themselves and said, “We must first listen carefully to what these people, the Tamils, are saying. Then we must see whether we understand what they are saying; maybe we don’t understand. Only if we have listened and understood should we open our mouths and talk otherwise we will just go and listen to what they are saying. That is our number one thing. Only if we listen and can understand should we make a response.”

Then the next meeting they undertook in a spirit of great humility, knowing that they are not coming to offer a solution here. And then things improved, because the Tamil side saw that these people were receptive. And the leaders from the South were also thankful to us. They told us “Prior to this we didn’t really believe what you were saying, that the Tamil people were suffering and that they were actually quite supportive of the LTTE. You had said that, but we didn’t believe it. Now, with our own eyes, we are seeing this to be true.” So our credibility is also enhanced in the eyes of the Sinhalese politicians, because what we had told them was indeed the truth.

And then the Sinhala and Tamil leaders engaged in a little negotiation among themselves about what the solution should be, as part of the exercises we conducted. Even there it was very interesting. They had formed two groups and asked the Tamils to suggest what types of powers they would like to have to resolve the conflict. And then when the Tamils came up with their solution, the Sinhalese looked at it and said, “But what role does the Central government play? The Central government will have no role at all in the scheme that you have outlined. You know all
the powers are being taken by the region. So then how can – we can’t go back to the Sinhalese and tell them the center has no power left.” So then the Tamils also acknowledged, “Oh, yes, that is true. We also have to give something, so that you can go back to the Sinhalese,” and they were prepared to give something. Of course, by that time the program had come to an end. But again, the message got through to both sides that dialogue and change is possible.

Sanath, a Sinhalese peacebuilder in Sri Lanka
On the Spiritual Dimension of Listening

The spiritual dimension of listening — for both the listener and the one listened to — is captured in this excerpt from *Siddhartha*, a novel by the German writer Herman Hesse, set in India during the years when the Buddha was alive.

Siddhartha sat down beside the old man and slowly began to speak. He told him now what he had never mentioned before, how he had gone to town that time, of his smarting wound, of his envy at the sight of happy fathers, of his knowledge of the folly of such feelings, of his hopeless struggle with himself. He mentioned everything, even the most painful things; he could disclose everything. He displayed his wound, told him of his flight that day, how he had rowed across the river with the object of wandering into the town, and how the river had laughed.

As he went on speaking and Vasudeva [the old man] listened to him with a serene face, Siddhartha was more keenly aware than ever of Vasudeva’s attentiveness. He felt his trouble, his anxieties and his secret hopes flow across to him and then return again. Disclosing his wound to this listener was the same as bathing it in the river; until it became cool and one with the river. As he went on talking and confessing, Siddhartha felt more and more that this was no longer a man who was listening to him. He felt that this motionless listener was absorbing his confession as a tree absorbs the rain, this motionless man was the river itself, that he was God Himself, that he was eternity itself. As Siddhartha stopped thinking about himself and his wound, this recognition of the change in Vasudeva possessed him, and the more he realised it, the less strange did he find it; the more did he realize that everything was natural and in order, that Vasudeva had long ago, almost always been like that, only he did not quite recognize it; indeed he himself was hardly different from him....

When he had finished talking, Vasudeva...took Siddhartha’s hand, led him to the seat on the river bank, sat down beside him and smiled at the river.

“You have heard it laugh,” he said, “but you have not heard everything. Let us listen; you will hear more.”

They listened. The many-voiced song of the river echoed softly. Siddhartha looked into the river and saw many pictures in the flowing water. He saw his father, lonely, mourning for his son; he saw himself, lonely, also with the bonds of longing for his faraway son; he saw his son, also lonely, the boy eagerly advancing along the burning path of life’s desires; each one concentrating on his goal, each one obsessed by his goal, each one suffering. The river’s voice was sorrowful. It sang with yearning and sadness, flowing towards its goal.

“Do you hear?” asked Vasudeva’s mute glance. Siddhartha nodded.

“Listen better!” whispered Vasudeva.

Siddhartha tried to listen better. The picture of his father, his own picture, and the picture of his son all flowed into each other...They all became part of the river. It was the goal of all of them, yearning, desiring, suffering; and the river’s voice was full of longing, full of smarting woe, full of insatiable desire. The river flowed on towards its goal. Siddhartha saw the river hasten, made up of himself and his relatives and all
the people he had seen. All the waves and waters hastened, suffering, towards goals, many goals, to the waterfall, to the sea, to the current, to the ocean and all goals were reached and each one was succeeded by another. The water changed to vapor and rose, became rain and came down again, became spring, brook and river, changed anew, flowed anew. But the yearning voice had altered. It still echoed sorrowfully,searchingly, but other voices accompanied it, voices of pleasure and sorrow, good and evil voices, laughing and lamenting voices, hundreds of voices, thousands of voices.

Siddhartha listened. He was now listening intently, completely absorbed, quite empty, taking in everything. He felt that he had now completely learned the art of listening. He had often heard all this before, all these numerous voices in the river, but today they sounded different. He could no longer distinguish the different voices — the merry voice from the weeping voice, the childish voice from the manly voice. They all belonged to each other: the lament of those who yearn, the laughter of the wise, the cry of indignation and the groan of the dying. They were all interwoven and interlocked, entwined in a thousand ways. And all the voices, all the goals, all the yearnings, all the sorrows, all the pleasures, all the good and evil, all of them together was the world. All of them together was the stream of events, the music of life. When Siddhartha listened attentively to this river, to this song of a thousand voices; when he did not listen to the sorrow or laughter, when he did not bind his soul to any one particular voice and absorb it in his Self, but heard them all, the whole, the unity: then the great song of a thousand voices consisted of one word: Om — perfection. (pp. 108 - 112)
SHOULD OPPRESSED PEOPLE EMPATHIZE WITH THEIR OPPRESSORS?

- The Question of Language
- Identifying the Ethical Issue
- Identifying Ethical Possibilities and Risks
- Exploring Concepts: What Do We Mean by Anger?
- Examining Assumptions
- Making Choices in the Face of the Dilemma
- A Note on Integrity
SHOULD OPPRESSED PEOPLE EMPHIZE WITH THEIR OPPRESSORS?

Few peacebuilders doubt that listening is key to promoting coexistence and reconciliation. There are circumstances, however, under which some of us wonder whether it is feasible or fair for enemies to listen to each other. The question of fairness arises especially in relationships marked by asymmetry — when participants enter a dialogue from communities marked by extreme differences in economic, military, and/or political power.

In this chapter, we will explore in some depth the fairness of encounters across differences in power, as Ahmed, a Palestinian Israeli coexistence, facilitator articulates the question. He raises the issue in reference to encounters between young people from Israel and from the Palestinian Authority. In his view, the defining feature of the relationship between the two communities in question is that of the Israeli occupation. Throughout the chapter we will consider other perspectives on the same question — from Jewish Israelis, from Palestinians living in the West Bank, from South Africans and from a Sri Lankan.

While we are exploring the question of whether people from communities with less power should empathize with adversaries from more powerful communities — or, in this specific case, whether people living under occupation should empathize with members of the occupying community — we will also be practicing a mode of ethical inquiry. Specifically, we will:

- Identify an ethical issue
- Identify ethical possibilities and risks
- Explore concepts
- Examine assumptions
- Integrate values by exploring what is right about opposing views
- Integrate values by imagining live ethical alternatives

This inquiry is meant to be useful both because of the issues we explore and its approach to grappling with ethical questions. Hopefully, you can adapt the methods to ethical issues and questions that emerge from your own peacebuilding practice.
The Question of Language

Before we read Ahmed’s narrative, we must pause to address a question about the language in which any ethical dilemma is framed.

In the first chapter of the guidebook, when we explored the nature of ethical inquiry, we discussed the importance of taking into account as wide a range of perspectives as possible. As the philosopher Cheryl Misak put it:

If what we are after [in an inquiry] are the beliefs which would best stand up to all experience and argument, then we had better not ignore a part of that experience and argument. The plurality of competing perspectives and beliefs must not merely be allowed, but encouraged. And of course, giving difference a chance to manifest itself will require that the conditions for such views to be articulated and to mature will have to be put into place.

One of the conditions that can prevent different views from being considered is the posing of ethical dilemmas in language that alienates people who represent particular communities or political viewpoints. If some people find it difficult even to participate in the conversation due to the words and definitions we are using, the entire inquiry will be diminished for the lack of their perspectives.

As peacebuilders, we are familiar with questions surrounding terminology. In some cases, questions about the words used to describe a conflict are themselves so contentious, and so resonant with the dynamics of the conflict, that it appears impossible for adversaries to find a common language with which to address differences. Similar problems can arise in the framing of ethical issues.

The language used to frame this chapter’s ethical dilemma runs the risk of alienating some of the users of this guidebook. The central story emerges from the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It is the story of Ahmed, a Palestinian Israeli coexistence facilitator, and the ethical dilemmas he faces. He frames his primary dilemma as: how do I facilitate coexistence between occupied and occupier? For many Israelis and for some Palestinians, describing the conflict exclusively in terms of occupier and occupied obliterates the complexities of the context — complexities that contribute to an assessment of the moral dimensions of actions taken by both parties.

For other Israelis and for many Palestinians, the central dynamic of the conflict is best described in terms of an occupation. For those who perceive the conflict in this light, not naming the occupation explicitly — discussing interactions between the 'more and less powerful groups' for instance — could be perceived as euphemistic and avoiding reality.

In this chapter, we use a variety of terms to refer to the power dynamics that inscribe the relationship between these two adversary communities: occupier and occupied, oppressor and oppressed, more powerful and less powerful. For some readers one, and only one, of these pairs of words may appropriately describe the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. For others, none of these words may accurately or adequately describe it. Our intention is neither to diminish the significance of the occupation, nor to imply that it is the sole defining dynamic of it. Rather, our intention is to recognize the complexity of the situation and to invite you, no matter how you respond to any of these terms, to continue the conversation about language as you pursue the inquiry of this chapter.
We encourage readers using this book to pause here and reflect on the meanings and the resonances of these different pairs of words. For those of you working in groups, the inquiry you undertake in relation to this chapter will likely benefit from an exploration of how different members of the group respond to the different words used. The goal of such an exploration is to frame the issue in ways that allow participation by all. It may be possible to find terminology acceptable to everyone or to come to an agreement to use different terms. In some cases, for everyone in a discussion simply to understand how different words resonate for each person in the group would, in itself, be an accomplishment. It could be useful for you to consider your reactions in light of your own social positions and political views.

Responding to Language

Write down your first reactions to the following pairs of words:

• Occupier/Occupied

• Oppressor/Oppressed

• More Powerful/Less Powerful

Are there other pairs of words that more accurately define the relationship between Israelis and Palestinians for you?

Thinking of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, what are the risks and possibilities of defining the relationship between the adversaries in terms of each of these pairs of words?
**Identifying the Ethical Issue**

In the following narrative, Ahmed, a Palestinian Israeli coexistence facilitator, discusses questions he asks about his work with young people from the Middle East. In the first sections of his narrative he describes his work with young people who are Arab and Jewish citizens of Israel. Toward the end of this excerpt he begins to explore his real dilemma. It emerges in the context of coexistence work undertaken with young people who are from the Palestinian Authority area (the West Bank and Gaza Strip) and Jewish citizens of Israel.

**Maintaining the Status Quo?**

In doing coexistence work with Arab and Jewish youth inside Israel, the issue of injustice is built into our workshops. It is so obvious, at least in our case in Israel, that there is no equality between the two parties. There is injustice, and people feel it all the time. The Jews are so privileged compared to the Arab people. If you take any topic, any subject, you can see that the Jews are privileged because of their nationality. For instance, the government invests much more in the Jewish educational system. In housing and in health insurance you can see it.

Many Jewish people also see the inequity, but they are not in a position to recognize their privilege. But as Arabs, we experience the injustice in our daily lives - so this is an obvious topic to discuss in our groups with young people. It is amazing that some of the Jewish kids who participate in these groups are shocked to hear about these things. They say, “How can it be like this?” When they learn that Arab mothers were given less money for their children than Jewish mothers, they argue, “Oh no, it can’t happen here.” They even argue with the Arabs, saying it is not true. Then after awhile, they start to justify it, saying, “But you don’t serve in the army, you don’t pay your duties to the state like we do.” They are looking for excuses why the injustice exists.

When I think about the Israeli flag and the Jewish signs that are everywhere in the society, I feel like I don’t belong. But many Israeli Jews are not willing to give up their “national rights.” And I am asking, as a minority in the state, how can I become a real part? How can we create circumstances where both Israeli Jews and Arabs will feel equal?

I think I would feel equal socially if I felt part of the state, and when the Jewish people would recognize the privilege that they have. The
minute they start to recognize that, I hope that they will work together with me to change the situation. Because I don’t believe it is just my problem; it is their problem as well. For their own sake they should deal with this issue. I don’t know how people can live feeling that they are creating injustice for another person living beside them. They should be worried about that, they should deal with it. They should be busy with it.

So in Israel, when we bring Jewish and Arab young people together, it is often the first time that they have come together to meet each other. And this already says a lot. People live in separate communities, five minutes by car from each other, and they don’t dare to go to each other’s communities to learn about the other culture. The majority kids especially come to our groups with a lack of knowledge about the minority. They are filled with stereotypes, some based on the national conflict between Israelis and the Palestinians who want a state. So it is very complicated. The minority kids come with a lot of rage and anger, and a lot of curiosity to listen to the majority people to see what they think about the injustice. And what they think about them, as a minority. Also, I see that in many cases the minority is looking for some acceptance from the majority. It is a classic case.

In this situation, I do a lot of uni-national work, where I am looking to strengthen the minority, their belief in themselves, their self-confidence, their self-esteem. I ask them: Why do you need the majority to accept you? Can’t you just live on your own, in your own community, with a separate educational system? I know they somehow have a need to be accepted as equals. The first step for them is to seek to be accepted as human beings; then maybe the majority might think about the injustice, and think that maybe Arabs should have full rights. But this is my analysis, really. These kids want to be accepted because they see their future is connected with the Jews.

For the majority kids, my goal is to bring them to a recognition of their privilege. I want to help them recognize that they are filled with stereotypes, that there is unfairness, and that they maybe should question the ideas they bring. They come thinking that the minority are not loyal to the state; that the minority doesn’t want them (as Jews) to have their own state; that the Arabs are a fifth column; that they shouldn’t have rights because they don’t serve in the army.

My goal for the majority is to bring them to a level where they can recognize the injustice and do something to change the situation. I don’t
want them to feel guilty or ashamed; I want them to do something to challenge the injustice. That might be a long-term goal. The short-term goal is to open their minds a little bit. I expect participants in our workshops to start asking themselves questions, to become more critical of the beliefs that they have about the other side, and about what is going on around them. The injustice is everywhere; you don’t need to search for it.

When I work with Israeli children and Palestinian children from the Occupied Territories, I face a real dilemma. Here I feel that if I don’t succeed in bringing the Israeli young people to recognize the real injustice of the occupation, then I have not done my work. I’m not necessarily asking for action-oriented outcomes, but at least for recognition of this injustice.

The Israelis need to recognize that they are occupiers. Period. They don’t realize it; they think that they are there for the sake of their country. They think it is not an occupation, but a part of their land. “We will give it back.” These are the terms they use. When a person comes to acknowledge that he is an occupier, I think he has to change the situation for the sake of himself, not for the other person. To be an occupier is a terrible thing. How can you allow yourself to do such a thing to another human being?

In this case, I question all the terms typically used in coexistence work: “mutual respect,” “peace between peoples,” “understanding each other.” How ethical is it to use these terms? Do they allow us to avoid the core of the problem, the crucial point? Am I asking the oppressed or the occupied to understand their occupiers, why they occupy them? Yes.

Another dilemma I face is this: I speak for a strategy that is not coming from rage and anger. It is not being “against” but being “with.” But how can we really practice it in real life? It might work, but it takes so long before it works. There is a very militant kind of activism for peace that is very offensive, but maybe very necessary. I think about Gandhi. Did he achieve anything? The day after he died there were massacres. I think about the Dalai Lama: he still advocates compassion for the oppressors.

— Dorit, a Jewish Israeli peacebuilder

Some say it is ethically dubious to promote coexistence between the oppressor and the oppressed. Personally, I see merit in that point. In a way, saying to somebody “You need to coexist” is saying that you need to accept the status quo. That “coexistence” talk is about not fighting. The way I hear it is as a message that you need to find ways of living in the situation you’re in. For me, being in a situation of oppression, the first rule is constant struggle to end that oppression. So how can you ask somebody to violate the fundamental imperative of the oppressed? No matter how nice your oppressors are, they’re still your oppressors. So I have no answer to that dilemma.

— Rachel, a Black South African activist

The Palestinian does need to understand the Israeli. He has to understand his situation and why he is so afraid. He has to understand his needs. But does facilitating that understanding mean that I am supporting the status
quo? That is my dilemma. Why aren’t the Palestinians simply saying to the Israelis: “Get out of here. Get out of the West Bank. You should just leave”?

I ask myself: should the occupied people have to trust the occupiers? When I work on the personal level and the occupied build personal relationships with the occupiers and meet them on a human level, I fear that their opposition to the occupation will be lessened. I might weaken their capacity to stand up for their rights to kick out the occupier...

Should the occupied kids be angry or not? This is a dilemma [only] for the occupier. I believe the occupied kids should be angry because they have to fight. From anger they can move to fight. They have to fight; they have to get freedom. We should remember that what got the Palestinians a seat at the table was the use of violence.

...if we are not willing to bring the occupier and the occupied together [in dialogue or encounters], then the occupied person has no choice but to fight and use violence in order to obtain freedom. But a violent strategy will never succeed, given the enormous imbalance of military power. I don’t have a complete answer to this dilemma. ☐
Identifying Ethical Possibilities and Risks

Ahmed faces a difficult ethical decision. He sees both ethical possibilities and risks in facilitating encounters between Palestinians who are living in the Occupied Territories and Israelis. Looking first only at the excerpt from his narrative above, we can see the arguments articulated or implied both in favor of and opposed to such work. To help focus our thinking, we have organized these arguments in a chart on the next page according to ‘ethical possibilities’ and ‘ethical risks.’

How can we decide what is the best course of action? A first step might be to see if we can add any possibilities and risks to those Ahmed articulated. See what you can add to the chart, on your own and/or in discussion with colleagues and friends. For the moment, this can be done in the spirit of brainstorming, adding all ideas without analyzing or reaching consensus about each one.

In brainstorming ethical possibilities and risks, it is often helpful to solicit ideas from people whose perspective is informed by different social and political positions than our own. Following the worksheet on the next page, this chapter presents four different texts, each offering some insights into the possibilities and risks of asking people living under an occupation to empathize with those from the more powerful community.
### Ethical Possibilities

- Israeli children might be brought to recognize the injustice of the occupation. Once they realize the suffering caused by the occupation, they will work to stop it, partly for their own sake. *(Ahmed)*

- Encounters can help Palestinian young people understand the needs and fears of Israelis, which may also need to be considered. *(Ahmed)*

- If not involved in dialogue or encounter as an approach to ending the occupation, Palestinians’ only alternative is violence, which cannot succeed. *(Ahmed)*

Other Possibilities:

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### Ethical Risks

- Encounter group and dialogue methods, with their vocabulary of “mutual respect,” “understanding” and “peace between people” can allow avoidance of the core of the problem, which is the occupation itself. *(Ahmed)*

- Encounter and dialogue methods could support the unjust status quo, by engaging Palestinians in understanding Israelis, rather than simply telling them to “get out” of the West Bank and Gaza. *(Ahmed)*

- Encounter and dialogue methods could support the status quo by encouraging Palestinians to trust Israelis, thereby undermining their opposition to the occupation. *(Ahmed)*

- Encounter and dialogue methods might undermine Palestinian anger, which they need to fight for their freedom. *(Ahmed)*

Other Risks:

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Why Should I Understand Them?

Let us now consider the story of Rina, a Jewish Israeli peace activist. She searched within her own experiences to try to understand why people in a less powerful position might feel violated by being asked to listen to someone from the more powerful community:

Many say that listening is a really key issue in the work of reconciliation, and I agree. But I was thinking about a coloured South African colleague who doesn’t want to listen to white people. Obviously, I can’t relate to that because I am in the category of the white woman — the ruler, the occupier — so it’s easier for me to listen to them [Palestinian people]. So I’ve tried to think of something that is analogous for me. And I’ve hit it: I cannot and will not listen to ‘the religious’ [i.e. people from orthodox Jewish communities in Israel, especially settlers and those defending them.] They’re always saying to us, “You’ve got to understand. You have to understand.” What they’re saying is that I have to understand them. I have to come to them. And it infuriates me. It’s like when men would explain how they really had it harder than women because they had all these responsibilities to make the living for the family. “It’s this tremendous responsibility, you’ve got to understand.” I don’t feel that kind of anger towards men, but I sure feel it towards [religious Jews in Israel.] Maybe that’s the only thing for me that would be analogous to what my South African friend means in terms of listening to a white South African.

The other day we met with a wonderful fellow, a colleague who is a religious dove and has been active for years. We always have him speaking; he’s brilliant. And I sat there holding my breath. Throughout the whole talk, he was excellent, but towards the end he started in with this same refrain: the secular don’t listen, they don’t understand. It’s hard to explain, but I guess because my resentment is so strong, I feel that I want them to understand me.

In Israel after the assassination of Rabin there was a call for soul-searching and for dialogue between Peace Now and the leaders of the settler movements. My response was that when they talk about unity they are saying that we should be sympathetic to them. In a sense I can understand the underdog not wanting to listen because when you are so sure that the other side is at fault, you say, “Why should I understand them?” There are a lot of people in Peace Now that are doing it, but I just can’t. I think I do understand the settlers intellectually, but I really do not want to empathize with them.

After the assassination, because of the shock, there were a lot of attempts at reconciliation within Israeli society. They set up meetings of religious and secular people, and of the leadership of peace with the leadership of the settler movement. We had two meetings, and I really was not very keen on it, but I went because others were very much in favor of
it. Most of the religious leaders who came were rabbis, supposedly the more modern ones, since they were willing to come. And that’s when I first started noticing the saying, “You’ve got to understand this.” You’ve got to understand this; you’ve got to understand that, whatever it might be. They were very much on the defensive because the assassination was committed by a religious guy. I just felt that they weren’t trying to understand us, and they weren’t really doing any soul searching. They weren’t really looking at what had happened, what in their own ideology had led to this kind of situation, and the kind of atmosphere that had been created. Instead they denied any responsibility and accused us of accusing them.

At one point in the conversation — I don’t think it was I who said it, but it might just as well have been — one of my colleagues said “I understand that for you settlements are absolutely necessary for security and that compromise is going to mean destruction and death. You’ve got to understand: for me every settlement that’s built is a nail on the coffin of my kid.” And I don’t think that they understand that.

...Once, I was speaking to a group — I think there were three inter-religious delegations from the States, and I and one of the fellows from the religious peace movements. I was briefing them. We were in a little back room in a restaurant. We were sitting at one table, we were five or six people, and unfortunately there was somebody at the next table. And who was it but a leader of the settler movement, there with her sons, and some other people, American visitors. Anyway we had to go on as if they weren’t there, and so I gave my shpiel on Peace Now and the other fellow gave his on the religious peace movement. We had a discussion, and when we were finished and got up to go, the leader of the settler movement who had been listening from her nearby table came up to me. She said, “You know, I listened to every word you said, and I have to tell you that’s it’s clear to me that you believe what you said and that you are a Zionist.”

And I thought that was tremendous, that she had understood that I believed what I said. She had listened, and I’ve had a lot of respect for her ever since. I knew her afterwards and I drove her down to Tel Aviv for a press conference once. We were bitter enemies — she’s in there with the settlers, pushing Palestinians out of their houses. But you see her comment is the kind of thing you don’t normally hear. Listening in a sense is saying “Maybe you’ve got a case; I don’t agree with the way you see it” — but at least there’s a certain respect for your motives.

I don’t think the Palestinians can listen to us, and it’s probably the same way that a coloured South African can’t listen to whites. That’s why I don’t even try. I don’t see any point in speaking to the Palestinians about terrorism and Israeli fear and pain, because I know they can’t hear it. I know they can’t hear it. They’ve heard “Holocaust” ‘til they’re blue in the face. They don’t need to hear that, and from their point of view, we caused the suffering. In the same way, from our point of view, they caused the suffering. The Israeli version says that the Arabs didn’t accept us, and they
invaded. But there’s no way a Palestinian can see it that way. So I’m not going to try and talk to them about it. What I try to do is talk about how we can get out of this.

This excerpt from Rina’s narrative relates to Ahmed’s dilemma in several different ways. It illustrates how listening can sometimes be experienced as a violation. When we find someone’s ideas or practices abhorrent, or when we feel that he has behaved in hurtful ways, we sometimes feel that listening would be wrong.

However, within this brief narrative, there is at least one strong argument for facilitating encounters between groups that are alienated from each other — even if such encounters fall short of generating understanding or empathy. Rina relates an experience when, unexpectedly, an adversary really listened to her. In spite of bitter and seemingly irreconcilable political differences, that act of listening created a degree of respect. So, from Rina’s story we might extrapolate the idea that encounters between more and less powerful groups are valuable if they facilitate respectful listening. Respect in spite of differences can be especially important when understanding and empathy are lacking. In bitter disputes and in conflicts characterized by violence, enhancing even by a small degree the quality of respect between opposing parties is a significant accomplishment.

On the other hand, Rina’s story helps us to identify two different kinds of risks to such encounters. First, she questions whether people living under harsh exploitative systems have the capacity to listen and to empathize with those from the more powerful group. It seems unfair to put someone in a position where they are expected to perform tasks they do not even have the capacity to accomplish. In addition, Rina’s concerns about understanding or empathizing with members of the settler movement raise a more general worry that encounters might put occupied people at risk of lending their energy and support to people with whom they ardently disagree and whose ideology they find abhorrent and hurtful.

The points have been added to the concerns raised by Ahmed on the worksheet on page 23 of this chapter, entitled “Facilitating Encounters in the Context of an Occupation — s2.”

“Respect in spite of differences can be especially important when understanding and empathy are lacking. In bitter disputes and in conflicts characterized by violence, enhancing even by a small degree the quality of respect between opposing parties is a significant accomplishment.”
I m So Sorry

Next let us consider a portion of a recent novel, Martyr’s Crossing, written by Amy Wilentz. Without retelling the entire story, we can summarize it in this way: the novel centers on an incident in which Ibrahim, a young Palestinian toddler, dies at a checkpoint on his way to the hospital in Jerusalem. An Israeli soldier, despite his own instinct to let the child and his mother pass, had detained them under orders from his superiors. Both the Israeli government and the Palestinian Authority attempted to manipulate images of the child’s death for propaganda purposes. After the child’s funeral, his grandfather, George, a doctor and intellectual living in the United States, went to visit the home in Jerusalem where he had grown up prior to 1948. In the dwelling he finds the family of Leila, the daughter of the poor Arabic-speaking Jewish family from Beirut who, during his childhood, had lived in the renter’s quarters on the first floor. Here is an excerpt from Leila and George’s awkward encounter.

“You look well,” Leila said in English.
“But changed, eh?” George said. “After all these years....”
“Well, we have all changed.” She looked down at her mottled hands and looked back up at him.

“Yup,” he said. His eyes moved around the room. He didn’t want to make Leila and her daughter miserable by being here and seeing all that was here to see, but what choice did he have? He couldn’t shift his view without noticing something else Leila would recognize as belonging to him. Every wall, every square of tile, for example. He felt he was hallucinating.

“How is America?” Leila asked. The daughter sat down in the easy chair.

“Big,” he said. “American.” What should he ask her in return? He was having trouble with the norms of politesse, which did not seem to fit the situation.

“This is your daughter?” he asked, groping for a subject.

“Oh, yes,” Leila said, flustered that she had not introduced them. “This is Noga.”

“Hello, Noga,” George said. Somehow, the girl was easier. She was new, and not so easily associated with history. She had no memory of those days, that chair. It was hers, as far as she knew.

“Hi,” she said, shyly. She was younger than Marina (George’s daughter) by about ten years, he figured.

“Do you have any others?” George asked Leila.

There was a small but noticeable silence.

“I had a son,” she said. She looked away toward the terrace. “He was killed last year in Lebanon.”

George found himself speechless, when words of condolence should have popped from his lips. You have to pay some price for taking away my land and living in my house for fifty years and for eternity, he heard himself think. He looked at Leila for too long a time, and he knew she could feel him looking. He knew that she knew what he was thinking. She probably had her own bitter, blaming thoughts about him, too.

But this is my childhood acquaintance, he told himself, still looking at her and sizing up in her profile all the puffs and hollows, the lines and droops that age had wrought on the little girl’s hopeful face. Like my loss, hers is a human loss also, a real
true loss to her, and to this girl Noga. Oh, yes, he thought, he had learned a lesson from Ibrahim's death. You had to pick carefully the things in the name of which you were willing to let people die, and then you had to be certain that was what they were dying for, and not for your own ambition, or someone else's, or for a plan that looked like the good plan but that actually was something else completely.

The Israelis had told her that her boy had died for the Jews and that was almost as big a lie as the Palestinians' trying to convince him that his had died for the Palestinians. Only a monster would fail to recognize the parallel, or someone who was shielding his eyes from a distasteful truth, and George was bent on resisting everything that generated blindness and monstrousness. He had not become, overnight — over one particular night — some kind of mush-headed humanist, but he was trying hard to keep in mind the value of what was human, the value of each person's own short-lived story. He was refusing, deliberately, to deny human empathy, no matter between whom. Deny human empathy and go down as a villain, he believed.

It was always wrong for the young to die before their elders, he thought: young soldiers were a clever tool invented by the middle-aged and the elderly to ensure their own continuing comfort. Young martyrs, too. If someone had to die for the cause of Palestine — and history had certainly shown that someone did — why not George or Ahmed or even Hassan, why not Leila or the Prime minister? Instead, his grandson was dead, her son was dead. Maybe in some vast eternal balance, her son deserved to be dead more than his grandson did — to pay back for the house, all the houses, the orchards, the vineyards, the refugees, the war dead, the fifty years (so far!) of statelessness — or perhaps (from the skewed Israeli point of view) Ibrahim was a minor, acceptable sacrifice for saving the Jews from another round of slaughter. But judging it from within the smaller, more precious frame of human reference, both boys should be standing here right now making faces at each other, the little one following the big one around and hanging on his legs.

"I am so sorry," George said to Leila, and meant it, as much as he could. She looked at him gratefully.

History was a sad business.

The fictional George reminds us that human empathy is not a capacity that benefits only its object. The ability to empathize is a capacity that nourishes and strengthens the empathizer — even, perhaps especially, one who can feel compassion for the suffering of an enemy; even more so, perhaps, compassion for the suffering of an oppressor. George reminds us of another of the ethical possibilities inherent in encounters between occupier and occupied: for members of an occupied community, the ability to see the human face of the 'enemy' is an important aspect of retaining their own humanity.

Encounter groups can support people from both sides of the conflict in seeing the human face of the other. As peacebuilders, we are concerned about the humanity of the people on all sides of a conflict. We can include this idea on the chart of possibilities and risks. [ ]
My Eyes Are Open Very Wide

The third text is a set of stories told by Reem, an advocate for women’s rights who was for many years a participant in Israeli-Palestinian dialogue. Her story helps us to understand the magnitude of the effort involved in holding onto one’s own humanity in the face of the indignities of occupation and violence. However, the ability to reach for ethical sensibilities, even of a soldier, can have important practical effects as well.

I often work with Israelis, but my only social relationship with an Israeli was with Amira, a journalist from the left wing. Last summer, I went with my husband to the kibbutz where Amira’s father used to live, for his reunion. All of a sudden, I noticed a wall, standing since 1948, in the Palestinian building style. From that moment, questions began surging up in my mind.

Why did Amira’s father decide to come from Russia, to replace the Palestinians who were living in this house? How did he deal with their memory, with their private things? How did I allow myself to turn the page and forget all these things? Suddenly I felt hatred inside of me, and a kind of vengefulness.

I heard the voice of my father talking about Jaffa and Haifa and the cruelty of the Jews during the war. And I remembered Sabra and Shatila. I remembered the first kid I saw shot by Israeli soldiers when I was eight or nine years old.

My husband and my children noticed something was wrong. I told them I was sorry, but I couldn’t tell them what was happening to me.

So we returned to the reunion and I saw the Israeli children and I felt very angry with myself. So I started this dialogue inside me: “At the time Amira’s father came to Palestine, there was the Holocaust. Maybe the problem is with the government, with the people in power.” I started this logical process, not on the same level with my feelings. I started to blame myself, feeling that my [ability to see his humanity] should come smoothly from my feelings.

It is still not easy for me. But each time I see my children, I feel my humanity – I can touch it. And at that moment, I can see the other side.

My eyes are open very wide, and I feel very tired from living this way. But it is very important for me not to lose my humanity – because if I can’t see your humanity, it creates a big dilemma for me.

For a while we had a woman from the Libyan parliament act as a third party and mediate our meetings of Israeli and Palestinian women. Still, all the time we differed in our political experiences and political principles. We laid out a set of principles and built all our projects around them. So the women of the Israeli peace camp and the Palestinian peace camp together developed the link for women in the peace process. At that time, in 1989, our efforts contributed to bringing peace.
In 1992 it became official and the peace process went further. We were officially allowed to meet with Israelis. I went through this process, and even during the horrible intifada confrontations I would go up to the Israeli soldiers and talk with them.

I remember one incident. During a demonstration, the soldiers started to fire bullets into a house. So I picked up a child in the house in order to look like the mother. The soldiers caught four teenage girls, including the real mother of the child, and brought them into a room where they started to beat them. I approached the soldier outside the door and I told him it was inhuman, that he had to do something. “I know you are human,” I said. “Did you ever see what happened to the Jewish people during the Holocaust? Look at yourself. I am sure you will never forget this shouting.” I talked to him more and found out where he was from, and that he was a doctor. He opened the door and spoke in Hebrew and the soldiers got out. He said, “Listen. You are a wonderful person. I would like to meet with you someday, really. You saved my humanity – you gave me the opportunity to stop that beating.”

Reem makes it clear that maintaining a sense of the humanity of a person from the “enemy” community takes a toll on her. But like the fictional George, the ethical cost of dehumanizing “the other” is even greater. And Reem’s story illustrates yet another ethical possibility: if Palestinian participants in encounters are supported to listen empathetically to Israelis, they might be better prepared to reach out for the humanity of soldiers and other authorities, and, in the process, interrupt violence and abuses of human rights. Reem’s understanding of Jewish values and history did in fact, serve her well — and, as it turns out, helped a soldier recover a degree of ethical clarity and courage as well.

Rina’s assertion that members of an occupied community might not have the capacity to empathize with members of the occupying community must be tempered with insights from Reem’s story. Even in the context of an occupation, some people from the less powerful community make the difficult choice to try to hold onto a sense of the humanity of those from the more powerful community — in part because it preserves their sense of their own humanity. This capacity may not be consistent over time, and it may not be distributed throughout all members of the community, but it would be a disservice to dismiss it as a possibility for all people living under occupation or severe oppression.
You Must Listen to My Past

Tariq, a teenage Palestinian boy from Nablus who was participating in the Seeds of Peace Camp for International Conflict Resolution wrote the final text in this series. In the mid-point of the camp, Tariq told his coexistence group the story of his experiences during the intifada. At the age of 9 he was caught throwing stones by Israelis and imprisoned overnight. He saw a fifteen-year-old friend and a twenty-three-year-old uncle killed. Tariq was filled with rage. The Israelis in the group questioned him: “Well, what did you expect if you were throwing stones?” In response, he spat out: “You Israelis are a people with no history and no culture,” apparently referring to the fact that Israel has been a state for only fifty years. “I don’t care if you are scared to ride in your buses. We deserve to be on this land and we will fight for it. I am proud to fight for it.”

This brief interchange in a coexistence session highlights one of the complications of encounters between Israelis and Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza. Young Palestinians, many of whom have witnessed the death of relatives and friends, usually need to rage and to mourn intensely. Healing can best occur when they move through these processes at their own pace, without being concerned with the sensitivities of their counterparts. Young Israelis, for their part, have often also lost loved ones in the context of the ongoing conflict with the Palestinians. Certainly, many of them have been traumatized by images of Palestinian violence against Israelis that are ever-present in the Israeli media. Many experience a constant fear of attacks on their personal safety and their national existence. Many Jewish Israelis also identify deeply with the historical persecution of Jews; indeed, for many of them that persecution has been a central part of their family history. In addition, young Israelis often have feelings of shame and guilt about the suffering of the Palestinians residing beneath layers of denial. If they witness the rage and grief of Palestinians in encounter groups before they have confronted their own complex feelings, it can sometimes have the effect of rigidifying their defenses rather than facilitating change. In the case of Tariq, the program did not provide sufficient opportunities for uni-national work prior to joint coexistence sessions.

During the session in which Tariq vented his rage, an Israeli girl walked out early, in tears. However, at the conclusion of a series of three coexistence sessions, the participants were invited to write a letter to any member(s) of the group. Tariq spent hours on the following message:

To all Israelis in my group:

1 - You are very angry about what I said yesterday and about the way in which I spoke but this is my way which I learned from your soldiers and your government because your people taught me to be always angry and because my heart was broken a lot of times and until now my heart is broken so when I said that your country is without culture or without history it is because your government tried to burn my culture and my history.

2 - You are very angry when someone says that he is from Palestine and you understand that he is from Haifa [i.e. from inside the 1948 boundaries of Israel]. I think you do that because you know that this land — which was occupied in 1948 and 1967 — is Palestine from the beginning of life.

3 - About suffering you said you are scared of bombing and you can’t find safety in buses but you must know that I can’t find safety in my home,
in my school, or in my hospital. The only place I find safety is in the
cemetery. You must know that Hamas activities started only four years ago,
and Hamas is a very small part of the Palestinian people. But your
government that makes troubles for my side was elected by 52% of your
people. And you must ask about the reason why Hamas makes these
bomming attacks.

4 - You said I should forget the past. My answer is that I must remind
you about my past because I’m afraid that what your government did to my
uncle and my friend maybe your government will do to me or to my father.
I need to live in peace with my family with my friends and maybe with my
sons and my daughters and my wife. The main important thing that I will
say is that I’m not talking about my past to make your heart broken but
you must listen to my past to understand my life and my story because we
must make peace.

By the end of the three-week camp, Tariq was strongly appreciated by the members of his
group, Israelis and Arabs alike, who all felt they had learned from him throughout the summer.
He had gained a measure of control over an all-consuming rage — a kind of anger that is
difficult to channel because it is experienced so viscerally and so strongly. It seems that one of
the ethical possibilities inherent in encounters between occupier and occupied is that members
of the occupied community can be heard. In addition, members of the occupying community
can come to understand, not only the injustice of the situation, but the suffering of people who
they have come to know, to respect, and even to befriend.

We can take the insights from Rina, George, Reem and Tariq and add them to the chart of
ethical possibilities and risks involved in facilitating encounters in the context of extreme
disparities in power.

It would be good to imagine ethical possibilities and risks from as many different points of
view as possible. Some people, for instance, might note that one possibility of such encounters is
that they afford Israelis the opportunity to tell their personal stories and to be seen by their
adversaries as complex human beings worthy of care. Others might worry that Israeli young
people who participate in encounters with Palestinians might come to empathize with
Palestinians in ways that diminish their capacity to defend their country from genuine threats.
What other possibilities and risks can you add to this chart?

Once you have developed a sufficiently long list of both risks and possibilities — a list that
incorporates the thinking of as many perspectives as you can imagine and of all participants if
you are working in a group — it is time to examine the ideas closely. Do some possibilities and
risks seem more important to you? Do assumptions underlying some contradict the assumptions
underlying others? Are there some with which you disagree?

Having considered your own thoughts and feelings, the perspectives of people in your
group and/or insights from the texts in this chapter, it would be good now to see if you actually
feel there is a dilemma in this issue. Are there two sets of values at odds with each other? Look at
the points on each side of the chart that you find most compelling, and try to articulate the
ethical tension, question or dilemma that captures your own sense of the issue.
### Ethical Possibilities

- Israeli children might be brought to recognize the injustice of the occupation. Once they realize the suffering caused by the occupation, they will work to stop it, partly for their own sake. *(Ahmed)*

- Encounters can help Palestinian young people understand the needs and fears of Israelis, which may also need to be considered. *(Ahmed)*

- If not involved in dialogue or encounter as an approach to ending the occupation, Palestinians’ only alternative is violence, which cannot succeed. *(Ahmed)*

- Encounters might facilitate respectful listening even if they fall short of facilitating understanding or empathy. *(Rina)*

- For members of an occupied community, one’s ability to see the human face even of the occupier is an important aspect of retaining one’s own humanity. *(George and Reem)*

- Reflecting an occupying soldier’s humanity back to him can help him make ethically better choices and help reduce suffering. *(Reem)*

- Encounters can provide an opportunity for Palestinians to express their rage and have its legitimacy acknowledged by others; they might gain a measure of control over when and how to express their anger. *(Tariq)*

- Encounters can help Israelis understand and empathize with the suffering endured by Palestinians. *(Tariq)*

- Encounters may give Israelis the opportunity to tell their stories and to be seen by Palestinians as complex human beings worthy of care.

### Ethical Risks

- Encounter group and dialogue methods, with their vocabulary of “mutual respect,” “understanding” and “peace between people” can allow avoidance of the core of the problem, which is the Occupation itself. *(Ahmed)*

- Encounter and dialogue methods could support the unjust status quo, by engaging Palestinians in understanding Israelis, rather than simply telling them to “get out” of the West Bank and Gaza. *(Ahmed)*

- Encounter and dialogue methods could support the status quo by encouraging Palestinians to trust Israelis, thereby undermining their opposition to the occupation. *(Ahmed)*

- Encounter and dialogue methods might undermine Palestinian anger, which they need to fight for their freedom. *(Ahmed)*

- People living under harsh exploitative systems may not have the capacity to listen and to empathize with those from the more powerful group. *(Rina)*

- Participating in dialogue groups puts occupied people at risk of lending their support to the people whose policies are harmful to them, with whom they ardently disagree, and whose ideology they find abhorrent. *(Rina)*

- It is exhausting to maintain a sense of the humanity of those who are oppressing one’s own community. *(Reem)*

- The capacity of Israeli youth to defend their country from attack might be diminished.

Other Possibilities:

Other Risks:
Exploring Concepts: What Do We Mean by ‘Anger’?

One approach to addressing ethical questions or to resolving ethical tensions is to explore the concepts embedded within the various ‘possibilities’ and ‘risks’ that were identified. There are many concepts referenced in the chart that warrant exploration, including:

- Anger
- Freedom
- Justice/Injustice
- Occupation
- Respect
- Suffering
- Trust
- Understanding
- Violence/Non-Violence

Rather than try to explore each of these concepts and the assumptions related to them here, we will focus instead on one concept to illustrate the approach. Ahmed worries that participating in encounter groups will diminish the anger felt by Palestinians and that this will leave them less able to fight for freedom. An assumption embedded in this point — the idea that anger is needed to fight for freedom — is an idea about which peacebuilders ourselves disagree. This makes it an interesting point to explore.

First, we need to deepen our understanding of ‘anger’ and why it is a concept that peacebuilders are likely to perceive differently. Take this opportunity to think through your own ideas about anger before reading further.

Almost everyone recognizes that anger is an inevitable part of human life. Unless repressed, it is a response that will arise when we feel attacked. The philosopher Jean Hampton has referred to this kind of response as primitive defensive anger which any of us, as a species of animal, will feel towards our attackers.

Living in a human community, however, requires us to do more than simply “attack back” whenever we feel we have been violated. We recognize that we might have been hurt by accident, or have misunderstood the motives of the one who hurt us. We also recognize that our impulse to react might not be commensurate with the harm we have experienced. Often, the impulse for revenge is restrained and transformed into an institutional arrangement of enforcing mechanisms and procedures for punishment — part of a system of retributive justice. Unchecked, primitive defensive anger can lead to escalations in violence, the pattern characteristic of war.

There is another kind of anger which many ethical and legal philosophers understand as serving a positive ethical purpose. A colleague of Jean Hampton, the legal philosopher Jeffrie Murphy, states the case in this way.

Exploring Anger

- What are your experiences with your own anger at injustice?
- What ethical possibilities are inherent in the emotion of anger?
- What ethical risks are inherent in the emotion of anger?
In my view, resentment (in its range from righteous anger to righteous hatred) functions primarily in defense, not of all ethical values and norms, but rather of certain values of self. Resentment is a response not to general wrongs but to wrongs against oneself...[1] am suggesting that the primary value defended by the passion of resentment is self-respect, that proper self-respect is essentially tied to the passion of resentment, and that a person who does not resent ethical injuries done to him...is almost necessarily a person lacking in self-respect...Resentment (perhaps even some hatred) is a good thing, for it is essentially tied to a non-controversially good thing — self-respect...If I count ethically as much as anyone else (as surely I do), a failure to care about the ethical value incarnate in my own person (that I am, in Kantian language, an end in myself) is thus a failure to care about the very rules of ethicality. To put the point in yet another way: If it is proper to feel indignation when I see third parties ethically wronged, must it not be equally proper to feel resentment when I experience the ethical wrong done to myself? Ethicality is not simply something to be believed in; it is something to be cared about. This caring includes concern about those persons (including oneself) who are the proper objects of ethical attention.

In response, Jean Hampton warns against many kinds of anger. She is especially skeptical of the ethical value of resentment, precisely the kind of anger Murphy lauds! Hampton believes anger arises from self-doubt and a lack of secure belief of one’s own value. Although they might suffer physically or financially from an attack, when people are fully confident of their own worth they will pity rather than resent their assailants.

Hampton is more sympathetic to indignation, an emotional protest against unethical treatment of someone other than one’s self. The purpose is not to assert one’s own value in the face of a potentially devaluing injury, as in resentment, but to oppose the immoral cause of those who commit immoral actions. She refers to indignation as ethical hatred, when it is directed against the person who committed the crime, rather than the crime itself. Reluctantly, because it conflicts with her cherished Christian values, Hampton finds herself also endorsing the rightness of ethical hatred, and the anger that animates it.

I may feel anger towards my attackers and call them “evil” or “wicked” because I am unable to comprehend why they should have done what they did to me unless they had lost to some significant degree the decency which normally is part of our humanity. Thus I see them as “bad.” Not just their actions or their character traits but their entire nature as persons takes on an evil cast... How can one hate the sin but not the sinner in [the case of someone who commits a horrible crime, such as inflicting undue suffering on an innocent child?] One who would commit such a sin seems so intimately linked with the evil upon which he acts that he seems to be, in and of himself, a kind of sin, irredeemably “rotten.” One’s opposition to his crime, and the insulting message implicit in that crime, inevitably becomes an opposition to him, and generates the desire to defeat him and his cause.

Murphy's view is that a certain kind of anger — righteous anger or resentment, directed against someone who has injured us, especially who has demeaned or degraded us — is a necessary component of self-respect. Hampton worries that resentment might result more from self-doubt than from self-respect. Still, she believes that it is ethically right to align oneself
against wicked actions and wicked people. If we view an occupation as an evil, as an ethical wrong, Hampton believes that ethically good people (ethically good members of both the occupied and occupying community, we might presume) should be angry with the occupiers and in fact should hate them.

Many scholars and theologians committed to notions of ‘restorative justice’ and compassion challenge the idea that anger at evildoers is ethically necessary and good. Dr. Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela, a South African social psychologist who served on the human rights committee of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, expresses a view that contrasts with both Murphy and Hampton. She describes her prison interviews with Eugene de Kock, the architect of perhaps the most brutal violence perpetrated by the apartheid regime. De Kock is someone who was so aligned with an evil regime that he could easily have been seen, in Jean Hampton’s words, as ethically “rotten” himself. In the aftermath of the violence, however, meeting de Kock in chains in prison, Dr. Gobodo-Madikizela discovered something different.

"Many scholars and theologians committed to notions of ‘restorative justice’ and compassion challenge the idea that anger at evildoers is ethically necessary and good."

...When I asked him to tell me about the meeting with the women whose husbands were killed by a bomb put together through his instructions, his face immediately dropped. Sitting directly across from me, his heavy glasses on the table that separated us, he shifted his eyes uncomfortably. His feet shuffled, and I could hear the clatter of his leg chains. His mouth quivered, and there were tears in his eyes. As he started to speak his hand trembled, and he became visibly distressed. With a breaking voice he said, "I wish I could do more than just say I'm sorry. I wish there were a way of bringing their bodies back alive. I wish I could say, 'Here are your husbands.'"

As he said this, he was demonstrating with his hands, demonstrating a desperation expressed with a feeling of needing to bring their bodies back. He was gesturing with his arms outstretched, but he said, "Unfortunately I have to live with it." As he said this, the table between us seemed to collapse. And reaching to him the only way one does in such human circumstances seemed natural.

When I touched his clenched hand, it was cold and rigid. It felt as if he were holding back. This caused me to recoil for a moment and to reflect on the spontaneous act of humanity as something incompatible with a circumstance with a perpetrator of such serious atrocities. However, other than his clenched fist, I could find nothing incongruous between his show of emotion and my response.

I had held back tears but let go of them the moment I entered the car for the drive back to Johannesburg. I was angry, but it wasn’t de Kock who was the object of my anger, but white people. Why did they continue to enjoy the fruits of apartheid and the oppression of black people, instead of speaking out against it? Why did they allow humanity to be destroyed in the way that de Kock’s was? That moment of shared humanity between de Kock and myself seemed to open up a window into the kinds of human possibility that would have been possible for de Kock had he not been brought up under a system that encouraged human corruption. Throughout the drive, frightened, angry, and confused, I blamed white society. I put myself in de Kock’s shoes and turned his experience in my head over and over again, and wondered where I would be had our roles been reversed.
Dr. Gobodo-Madikizela still experiences anger. But she focuses her anger not on the individual perpetrator but on white society as a collectivity.

Dr. Gobodo-Madikizela would accept that there are ethical possibilities in an occupied person seeing the humanity of particular members of the occupying community. Her approach is consistent with Christian theology and with African-based conceptions of restorative justice: to distinguish between the hateful sin and the sinning, yet human, sinner. For many people, including the philosopher Jean Hampton (quoted above), a person who had perpetrated as much suffering as de Kock would fall outside of the circle deserving of compassion. Dr. Gobodo-Madikizela’s perspective, though, is based on a strong sense of ethical interdependence. Yes, we must be held accountable for our actions; but we must also hold accountable the social systems and cultures that gave rise to inverted ethical structures — even as these are manifested in the actions of individual persons. (Of course the context here is significant: the evil-doer is in prison and in chains, the apartheid regime no longer in power.)

In some ways similar to Dr. Gobodo-Madikizela’s approach, and at the opposite end of a continuum from Jeffrie Murphy, we find opinions like those expressed by Thich Nhat Hanh, the Vietnamese Buddhist monk and philosopher of peace. Like Gobodo-Madikizela, he focuses on the web of conditions that give rise to individuals’ hurtful actions. He does not, however, focus his anger on the oppressing collectivity. He asks each of us to understand how our own actions or inaction are implicated in the circumstances that give rise to hurtful behaviors. His message is: acknowledge anger, but before giving it expression, transform it. Thich Nhat Hanh writes:

"If we work for peace out of anger, we will never succeed. Peace is not an end. It can never come about through non-peaceful means. When we understand the reasons for the hurtful action [perhaps a history of violence or inadequate parenting] we will no longer blame [the perpetrator] for making us suffer, because we know that he is also a victim. To look deeply is to understand. Once we understand, we will long for him to suffer less.

Thich Nhat Hanh’s compassion extends to American veterans of the Vietnam war. He is also able to feel compassion toward those who have abused their power, even pirates who rape young girls fleeing from Vietnam.

When you first learn of something like that, you get angry at the pirate. You naturally take the side of the girl. As you look more deeply you will see it differently...In my meditation I saw that if I had been born in the village of the pirate and raised in the same conditions as he was, I am now the pirate. I cannot condemn myself so easily...Many babies are born along the Gulf of Siam, hundreds every day, and if we educators, social workers, politicians, and others do not do something about the situation, in 25 years a number of them will become sea pirates. That is certain. If you or I were born today in those fishing villages, we might become sea pirates in 25 years. If you take a gun and shoot the pirate, you shoot all of us, because all of us are to some extent responsible for this state of affairs.
It is important to note that the Buddhist approach does not ask us to deny our anger. On the contrary, Thich Nhat Hanh argues that when we are angry, we become our anger, and to deny it would be to violate ourselves. Rather, he encourages us to acknowledge our anger but not to express it before it has been transformed through meditation. Meditation allows us to perceive the web of responsibility that surrounds any hurtful action: all of the actions and non-actions that have contributed to the situation.

Thich Nhat Hanh would categorize the loss of anger among an oppressed people as an ethical risk only if the anger is suppressed. As long as anger is acknowledged, it can be transformed into compassion. This he would see as an ethical possibility — allowing a struggle for freedom to be motivated by compassion rather than rage.

We will turn to the question of what motivates struggles for freedom in the next section of this chapter. First though, it is interesting to compare the different conceptions of anger presented by the four authors quoted in this section:

- **Jeffrie Murphy** believes that anger is intimately tied to feelings of self-worth, and that anger is an appropriate and ethically positive response when one feels that one’s worth has been attacked or violated.

- **Jean Hampton** argues against his view. She argues that if we are thoroughly convinced of our value, we will feel pity, not anger, for the one who has assaulted us. However, Hampton does promote the ethical value of a different kind of anger: indignation and even hatred. Anger is needed, she says, to separate or distance oneself from a wicked action and from persons who have behaved so abhorrently that they have become ethically rotten.

- **Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela**’s story illustrates the possibility of separating evil actions from the person who does them. While being angry at the action and the society that perpetrated it, she finds compassion for evil-doers appropriate and potentially transformative.

- **Thich Nhat Hanh** goes a step further, suggesting not only that we should have compassion for the person who engaged in evil actions, but that we should understand the complexity of forces that gave rise to the evil, and focus especially on our own complicity in it. He would suggest to Jean Hampton not that her perception of the evil is wrong, or that it is inappropriate to feel resentment or indignation. He believes that people should acknowledge their anger, but then transform it into compassion before acting on it.

How do the thoughts you wrote about anger before reading this section compare with the various ideas about anger presented by these four scholars? Having now considered several different approaches to anger, it would be good to return to the questions you considered prior to reading this section. What are the ethical risks and possibilities inherent in the anger we feel towards injustice?
Experiencing Assumptions

At the core of Ahmed’s dilemma about facilitating encounters in the context of occupation is a question about whether such dialogues ultimately serve to reinforce an unfair status quo. He worries, in particular, that people will lose their anger, an anger that they need to struggle for freedom. Let us first reflect on our own assumptions about the motivations of struggles for freedom, and then examine his assumption in light of the different conceptions of anger we have just identified.

What Motivates People to Struggle for Freedom?

- Do you believe that anger is necessary to a struggle for freedom? Why or why not?

- In your own view, what various factors can motivate people to struggle for freedom?

- Do you believe that the outcome of a struggle is influenced by the nature of people’s motivation?

- When we struggle for freedom, what is it that we are seeking freedom from?

Each conception of anger raises interesting questions about the relationship between anger and the capacity to struggle for freedom.

- **Jeffrie Murphy**, we recall, believes that resentment at being violated is a kind of ethically good anger necessary to defend self-respect. What does his conception of anger suggest about Ahmed’s assumption that anger is necessary to wage a struggle for freedom?

Murphy appears to lend weight to Ahmed’s worry. Oppressive systems continually and brutally assault the sense of self-respect of those who are their victims. Victims of such systems may feel violated when they are asked to suspend the emotional stance that serves as a defense against this assault. In other words, they may feel violated when asked to engage with and listen to a person from the community responsible for the harm.

Furthermore, it is impossible for members of an oppressed community to wage a protracted and difficult struggle against an oppressor if they have internalized the sense of degradation and diminishment that characterizes the oppression itself. Struggle may in fact require a kind of self-protective resentment. Perhaps it needs the ethical clarity that is associated with righteous anger.

Thinking of anger as linked to self-respect and ethical clarity might lead us to wonder, then, whether dialogue and other encounters with one’s oppressor necessarily challenge the anger of the oppressed in ways that undermine their clarity and self-respect? Could encounters be designed in ways that minimize this risk?

- **Jean Hampton** says that in some cases, anger is needed to distance oneself from a wicked action and from persons who have behaved so abhorrently that they have become ‘ethically rotten’. If we accept her view as valid, we must nevertheless ask, however, if every citizen of a nation that inflicts harm is to be seen as so evil that they should be the object of sustained hatred. Furthermore, we must ask if there are mitigating circumstances — such as the need for self-defense, or the perception of such a need — that must be considered before dismissing someone as ‘ethically rotten’.
Hampton herself would likely reply that it is important to distinguish between the individual citizen and the actions of a government. Many members of an oppressive society, including those who are reluctant beneficiaries of the injustice, disagree with their government's policies. Others, particularly children, cannot be held fully responsible for the oppression. They are certainly not responsible for governmental and military policies; nor are they even fully responsible for the beliefs and values into which they have been socialized.

To determine whether one is able to trust adversaries as dialogue partners, it is generally necessary to see historical and current circumstances through their eyes. How do the dominant members of an oppressive society view the actions of their government? What are their understandings of the forces that motivate and perpetuate the oppression? It seems irresponsible and indiscriminate to dismiss people as evil without seeking to learn about their interpretation of events.

- **Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela** might suggest that anger is more appropriately directed towards the evil-perpetrating system and not towards individual citizens. Embedded in Gobodo-Madikizela's ideas about anger is a strong sense of the ethical interdependence of human beings. Rather than focusing blame only on the person inflicting harm, she would invite us to look at the larger context. How have larger historical and social circumstances contributed to the hurtful action? If given the opportunity, over time, even persons involved in horribly harmful actions might themselves feel remorse.

Gobodo-Madikizela's conception of anger leads us to ask whether encounters might be designed to help participants decide where to direct their anger and how to express it. Can encounters be designed to help oppressed people experience their anger, gain some measure of power in relation to it, and make wise (compassionate and effective) choices in relation to it? Might encounters also serve to help members of the dominant group set themselves apart from and even criticize the hurtful policies of their own government?

- **Thich Nhat Hanh** would hope that encounters in the context of violence and extreme disparities in power would provide opportunities for participants to transform their anger. His writing suggests that struggles for freedom, if motivated by anger, simply perpetuate cycles of violence. All too often, anger is expressed in ways that can perpetuate violence without actually moving a conflict in the direction of justice or a people in the direction of freedom. At the very moment when what is needed is receptivity to new ideas, the expression of anger can contribute to defensiveness.

Participants in encounter groups, furthermore, are present only partly by virtue of their membership in their communities. They are also there as persons, people with rational and emotional capacities and ethical sensibilities — able to take their own positions on issues distinct from the positions of their government. As a result of what they learn during the encounter, they might become allies with each other.

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**To Love One's Oppressor**

I do not question that loving one's oppressors—Cambodians loving the Khmer Rouge—may be the most difficult attitude to achieve. But it is a law of the universe that retaliation, hatred, and revenge only continue the cycle and never stop it. Reconciliation does not mean that we surrender rights and conditions, but rather that we use love in all of our negotiations. It means that we see ourselves in the opponent—for what is the opponent but a being in ignorance, and we ourselves are also ignorant of many things. Therefore, only loving kindness and right mindfulness can free us.

— Maha Ghosananda, a Cambodian Buddhist peacemaker

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Examine Ahmed’s Assumption in Light of Different Views of Anger

1. Jeffrie Murphy believes that resentment at being violated is ethically good because it is necessary to defend self-respect. What does this suggest about Ahmed’s assumption that anger is necessary to a struggle for freedom?

2. Jean Hampton believes that it is ethically right (and even necessary) to feel indignation, a kind of ethical anger, and even ethical hatred, towards evil actions and the people who have become inseparable from their evil deeds. What does her conception of anger suggest about Ahmed’s assumption that anger is necessary to a struggle for freedom?
3. Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela directs her anger toward the offending collectivity rather than against individuals — even in cases of people who have engaged in heinous actions. What does her approach suggest about Ahmed’s assumption that anger is necessary to a struggle for freedom?

4. Thich Nhat Hanh believes that peace can never be achieved by actions motivated by anger. What do you see as the relationship between peace and freedom? When people struggle for freedom, what are they struggling for freedom from? What does his conception of anger suggest about Ahmed’s assumption that anger is necessary to struggle for freedom?
Thich Nhat Hanh would want participants to look into their own beings and their own communities to see how they share some of the responsibility for the oppressive situation. Even in situations of power asymmetry, members of the less powerful community are not powerless. While taking care to avoid blaming the victim, facilitators can encourage even people living under occupation to consider how the actions of their own people might have contributed to the cycle of violence and the oppression they find so enraged. How have people living under occupation, as individuals and as communities, contributed to the circumstances that have given rise to the hurtful behaviors?

Now that we have examined Ahmed’s assumption that anger is required for a struggle for freedom, and raised several questions about it, return to the notes you made before you read this section. What are your thoughts at this point about the relationship between anger and communities struggling for freedom?
Making Choices in the Face of the Dilemma

We have taken many steps in exploring the dilemma Ahmed posed in the story near the beginning of the chapter. We identified his ethical dilemma, and then brainstormed the ethical possibilities and risks associated with facilitating encounters between Israelis and Palestinians living in the West Bank and Gaza. After that we explored different meanings associated with one particular concept, anger. Then we used a more nuanced understanding of anger to examine one of Ahmed’s assumptions: that anger is needed in a struggle for freedom.

Now we might be ready to consider different choices we might make in the face of this dilemma.

How do we make choices when an action contains both ethical possibilities and risks? One approach is to try to “think outside the box,” to imagine different alternatives that integrate the most important values on both sides of the dilemma.

Before reading this section, look at the list of ethical possibilities and risks you have compiled throughout the chapter. What would be right about a choice to facilitate an encounter in the context of extreme disparities in power? What would be right about refraining from facilitating such an encounter? What values would be exemplified by each choice?

Can you think of courses of action — perhaps a way of designing encounters or perhaps an entirely different kind of intervention — that would incorporating what you feel is right about both sides of the dilemma? Jot down your own ideas before reading stories from several peacebuilders about how they have made choices in the face of this dilemma.
Integrating Values

Look over the list of ethical possibilities and risks you have developed in relation to Ahmed’s dilemma.

1. What would be right about a decision to facilitate encounters in the context of extreme disparities in power? What values would be exemplified in such a choice?

2. What would be right about a decision to refrain from facilitating such encounters? What values would be exemplified in such a choice?
3. How might encounter groups be structured (in terms of composition, sequence of activities, purposes, etc.) so as to minimize the ethical risks and maximize the ethical possibilities?

4. Can you think of other courses of action peacebuilders might take that integrate the values associated with both the ethical risks and the ethical possibilities?
We C T e c tio n to Solve Problems

How did Ahmed himself resolve his dilemma? In this portion of his narrative he describes two moments about which he felt positively: one in the context of an encounter, and one in a completely different sort of action.

I still believe in a win-win solution. Going back in history won’t bring us anywhere. If Palestinians assert that Jews have no right to be in the region, then the Israelis will feel they have nothing to gain and just use their power to continue to occupy the Palestinians.

Some people doing coexistence work are afraid to touch the injustice of the occupation, because they are afraid of losing the occupiers’ participation. If the occupiers were to pull out of their program, the program would have lost everything. The occupiers know this, and it gives them a lot of power.

The dynamic is very different in my work at Givat Haviva [with Jewish and Arab citizens of Israel]. There, it is very easy for the majority to acknowledge that there is injustice and to say that it is terrible, we should work to change it. It is totally different, dealing with majority/minority, from when you are dealing with occupier/occupied. The majority kids are shocked to learn of the injustices, but they are not threatened by acknowledging them. But there is something about the Israeli self-image that is very threatened by acknowledging that their soldiers are occupiers—since everyone in Israel must serve in the military.

Recently, at Givat Haviva, we did some work with Israeli and Palestinian University students. One of the Israeli students was already very open when he came to the workshop; he was already willing to listen to the other side. So after the session he and his brother went to Gaza to visit some people he had met in the workshop. He was shocked to see how people lived—that they can’t really move and they can’t go out and they can’t leave. He saw tens of thousands of workers from Gaza, coming back from Israel, being stopped at the checkpoints. It is terrible to see thousands of people herded like animals. He came after that and shared with us his feelings, and said he now realized how cruel the occupation was. The Israelis used to say that they are somehow good occupiers, benevolent. We discussed that there is no such thing—that you occupy people and you oppress them in many ways, and it is a terrible thing to do. I felt that this guy did real work with himself. I saw changes. This educational work is very difficult because it is a long-term investment in people. I don’t expect changes right away, but sometimes people come to you ready, somehow—probably after having started the process years ago.

...We also did one encouraging thing when the Palestinians in the West Bank were very short of water. At Givat Haviva, at the Jewish Arab Center for Peace, we have a mixed group of educators who raised the water problem. Two of us facilitators went to the leadership of the Jewish Arab
Center, and right away we decided to take action. In two weeks we organized about 50,000 cubic meters of water, knowing that we weren’t going to solve the problem completely, but at least raise public awareness. There was a lot of participation from different organizations, and the media covered the event.

We left Givat Haivva with fifty or so people and the trucks of water, with signs supporting peace and water distribution to Jenin. On the way to Jenin, we encountered a right-wing Jew who protested by himself, which was quite courageous of him. His sign read “Water for the Jews and not the Terrorists.” I asked him to consider “Water for the Jews and Palestinians and not to Terrorists.” He didn’t agree. But the conversation itself was amazing.

We coordinated with the Palestinian National Authority, so we were received very nicely and the media coverage was extensive. It was a small contribution, but I think it said a lot. It was empowering to us. We realized we can take action to solve problems. When they were distributing the water to the refugee camps, it was amazing to see the kids. Somehow it fed us with energy; we weren’t just talking, we were doing something.

This was a unique effort. We were working to address an injustice, but at the same time we were building relationships between us. In Jenin, the director of the Jewish Arab Center (who lives in a kibbutz) said that her children had never known what it was like to be short of water. She was sharing that publicly and it was excellent.

This excerpt from Ahmed’s narrative points to two different ways in which he addresses his concern that encounter groups somehow serve to reinforce the status quo. In the instance where an Israeli student was able to fully acknowledge the injustice of the occupation, he obviously made sure that the encounter was structured to raise (rather than repress) discussion about the occupation itself. From his description, do you think the ethical benefits of holding this encounter outweighed any possible harm it may have caused?

In the second instance, he describes a different approach: an action undertaken jointly by Palestinian Israelis, Jewish Israelis and Palestinians living in the West Bank. Here the action itself was designed not only to raise public awareness of the unfair system for distributing water, but also to make a gesture that addressed the injustice and simultaneously built relationships.

Following Ahmed’s lead, one question we can ask ourselves is how to structure dialogues and encounters so as to maximize the ethical possibilities and minimize the ethical risks that go along with them. A second question is what other kinds of interventions, besides encounters, might facilitate understanding, build relationships, and simultaneously comprise steps toward freedom, justice and peace.

If you have not already done so, take some time to think of alternative courses of action that integrate the values inherent on both sides of the ‘ethical possibilities and risks’ chart you developed earlier. Are there some paths that both honor and connect the most important values at stake?
Diologue of Eau is

We are now seeking to develop a list of “live ethical alternatives,” to this dilemma. These are strategies that integrate the most important values embedded in both sides of the dilemma, even when they appear at first to conflict. We can get some help from the narratives of other coexistence and peacebuilding practitioners, as we did earlier when we were exploring ethical possibilities and risks.

First, we can consider a portion of Ruth’s story. Ruth is a Jewish Israeli who lives in Jerusalem and has worked in dialogue groups for many years. She refers to the intifada that began in 1988. She told the story in 1998, prior to the more recent intifada, which began in September, 2000.

After the intifada had begun, when we were first invited to meet with Palestinians from the town of Beit Sahur, near Bethlehem, for a dialogue of equals, they explained to us that such a dialogue had been impossible during their previous humiliating state. The sense of pride and unity they gained from just a few months of the popular uprising gave them the status necessary to invite us as potential friends, as partners to conversation and change. Our work together since then has been based on this equality, although it is an extremely delicate equality of worth, not of status or power.

We started as a group of about fifteen people on each side, meeting once every two weeks in people’s homes, alternately in Jerusalem and Beit Sahur. The Palestinians were purposeful. They had a message to get across, which they claimed was the message of the intifada: Israelis are welcome as guests and friends, but not as occupiers.

Very soon we felt dissatisfied with the limits of the dialogue and started simultaneous public activities in both Beit Sahur and Jerusalem. Since overt political gatherings were forbidden by the army at the time, these activities turned into real adventures which bonded the group. Strategies were worked out together to fool the army. Back roads were explored to avoid roadblocks. Meetings were held in churches, the only places Palestinians were allowed to gather in large numbers. Twenty-five Israeli families sneaked in on a Friday afternoon to spend Shabbat as guests of a Palestinian neighborhood. A van full of kosher food to share with the hosts had preceded them.

The creativity and risk-taking on both sides gave the dialogue-action groups considerable prestige and trust in the community. There was also ample opportunity to help Palestinian friends who had been jailed or harassed, to pressure Members of Knesset, to pay condolence calls. Through these early activities we developed and advanced our goals: to create political change by setting an example of “what could be” through cooperative projects; to be a mechanism of “damage control” on the Israeli side; to be hothouses for creating new, deeply committed activists for peace and justice.

Before the closures made it impossible, we hosted Palestinians at synagogues, evening forums, and on kibbutzim to speak and meet informally with Israelis. But not everything needs to be sit-down, extended dialogue. In
the villages we took hikes and helped the families with the olive harvest. In Jerusalem we had a concert series of Arab and Israeli musicians. We created a photography exhibit on dialogue activities emphasizing the variety of different ways of communicating. The large activities were also intended to gain media coverage, sometimes successfully. In Beit Sahur, a town with a Christian majority, we have held a Christmas torchlight procession for peace and justice for the past five years. Thousands of Palestinians march with their Israeli friends through the town to a churchyard. This year the march ended with an Israeli choir singing peace songs in Latin, English, and Hebrew and spontaneous dancing of Palestinian policemen, kids, and Israelis in a kind of self-generated euphoria, with no rational explanation.

Ruth’s story raises several interesting possibilities. First, that dialogues or encounters can be initiated by the group living under occupation, perhaps on its own terms. In addition, dialogues can be linked with activities and activism of various kinds: intervening on behalf of individuals, pressuring governmental leaders, and public events designed to gain media attention. As Ruth points out, even small projects can contribute to change by setting an example and by enlivening people’s imaginations.
They Speak Without Fear

Another story comes from a conflict in a completely different region of the world: the South Asian island country of Sri Lanka. In Sri Lanka, the Tamil population, concentrated in the northern provinces, perceives itself to be under occupation by the troops of the Sinhala-majority government. In this excerpt of his narrative, Murali describes his work primarily within the Tamil community. His methods are drawn from theater and traditional rituals. Interestingly, for our inquiry, he addresses the issue of anger — as an emotion apparently linked to courage. After deeply expressing their feelings, Murali says, Tamil people will not accept being oppressed, but they are, at that point, also ready to listen.

In the early 90’s our theater group conducted some workshops in a very interior peasant village. We were not sure about these workshops, but when we began, people cried. They expressed their feelings. At last they told how they found a different life here. We experienced very close relationships with these people.

Our theater group recognized that the people themselves have inner energy and suppressed feelings. Henceforth, rather than use our theater skills to perform propaganda dramas (as we had earlier), we constructed rituals that invited people to express their feelings and thus build on their human resources.

The rituals take place in houses. It is as if the house has life and vibrancy of its own, and people can feel the house as they enter it. A lot of reverence is paid to the place. Flowers are brought in and placed on a white design. People remove their slippers and touch the ground. People have said that after entering this area they have felt the house responding to them.

There are drummers inside the house. As people enter, they dance to the music and sway from side to side. They are seized by the music. As the music goes on, people begin to dance faster and more energetically. The dancing can become very frenzied and emotional. People manifest themselves in very different ways. For instance, one person was so rigid that he was frozen in place and his eyes were frozen in place. Some people cry, others scream. People hit things.

The forms are similar to traditional rituals. But the traditional rituals deal with supernatural powers. We believe in human leaders and the power of human interaction.

In one case a man had his teeth and fists clenched shut and his eyes were staring, fixed in one place. Someone asked what was the matter and he replied that someone with a mask was chasing him. We gave him a cardboard mask and he chewed it to pieces and spit it out. This was the process that calmed him down.

Sometimes people in the workshop see images involving someone else who is there. I might have a vision of you running up into a spiral, being chased by many people, and you would have no place to go. I see that you are faced with a sea of red and rocks and that you have to jump because you have
nowhere else to go. It’s an aspect of the unconscious that manifests these images of other people.

After these images come up, people sit together and talk about the images and what they have seen. After that, they act out what they have envisioned.

One girl saw an image of a ghost chasing her. The ghost had a torn mouth. She chose to express this using four or five people to show that one ghostly figure, because she didn’t feel one person could adequately represent the ghost. She still had problems expressing the torn mouth. Usually we use other materials like masks, but this girl, who was a senior in high school, felt she couldn’t in any way express the torn mouth. This vision related to the political situation.

Another time, a man described a vision in which the army was burning a couple’s children right before their eyes. He was actually remembering an incident from when he was nine years old.

The rituals can go on for six days. People stay overnight and we cook together. There are sessions for meditation. People talk amongst themselves and perform for each other. There is a closeness and intimacy that comes out of these interactions – a closeness that they have never felt before. In our culture men and women don’t touch each other, but after these workshops there is no such inhibition and people hold each other and support each other. Emotions are very intense – not sexually, but in another way. We might start at seven in the morning and go until eight at night, but if the activity goes over the allotted time, they just keep going until they are done for the day. The last day does not end; they don’t go to sleep. They stay up from Friday morning until Saturday morning and then they leave for home.

The people who participate in these workshops leave as stronger, more courageous people, and with the feeling that they have been a part of the family. They come out as happier people who have experienced peace of mind. They are not ready to accept oppression; but neither are they willing to oppress others. If you try to oppress them, they will get angry. They will not accept it. Going to a workshop like this gives them courage, and so they speak without fear.

The change takes place because the people express themselves at a very deep level. They are given the tools to express themselves, and to bring forth all that they are holding inside. The workshops are a deliberate process through which they are able to bring their suffering, their fears, and their hopes out into the open.

In our theater group we are all friends. Although there is a big age difference, we are all equals. We don’t have that much schooling, but our minds are very clear and powerful and our people are very energetic. We can get dancing and acting skills very easily, but we have to develop the inner mind. We experience a very good life in our theater group. It is giving something to everybody and we enjoy that – even amidst the chaos and oppression and everything.

I came to Colombo in 1995, although there was fear about going there because the army had captured Jaffna. I preferred to live in the LTTE-controlled
area, but my wife could not live in those conditions with no electricity, no water, no toilet facilities, and no wells for drinking.

In Colombo, step by step, I made contact with the Peace Council, and I found them to be very genuine. They wanted to hear stories from the Tamil people and understand us. Only then did I realize that we had to speak out and tell the stories of our real condition.

One of the major issues in Sri Lanka is that the Sinhalese people do not know what the Tamil people want. There is the presence of the military group, the Tigers, but there is no communication between the Tamil people and the Sinhalese people. Many Sinhalese people genuinely feel that the Tamil people are oppressed by LTTE. So now we have a project to get the Tamil viewpoint out.

This is what we are working towards now. After Tamil people have participated in our ritual workshops, they are better able to express themselves. We are preparing to perform a Sinhala mass, and people will understand because the performance is mostly body movements.

Our goal is for the people on both sides to become better listeners to each other. First we develop listening skills through theater activities, working with each group separately. Then we bring the two groups together for dialogue, but using those new listening skills.

Through their participation in theater, people’s minds are broadened. They begin to form a collective voice for peace. They become more willing to listen to Sinhalese people and their perspective. This allows everyone to hear the other side and how they perceive the situation. This is what we hope will happen in the exchanges we are planning.

Murali’s story points to several very important possibilities. First, he describes work that is based on the traditional cultural forms of the people who have experienced violence and occupation for many years. The work includes methods that address people’s trauma, allowing them to deeply touch and express their feelings in a safe environment. The feelings are held, in a sense, not only by the other participants, but by the forms of the ritual itself. In these ways the work, done in homogeneous settings at first, addresses the effects of violence on both the culture and the person.

Whatever form it might take, the work of preparing people for dialogue and for meeting “the other” is significant and full of potential, as Murali’s story reminds us. In this case, Murali’s workshop is designed to give Tamil participants a deep sense of courage and peace of mind. In spite of military, economic and political inequities, therefore, they are ready to engage with their counterparts as human beings with equal worth. These participants will still become angry if they are oppressed, but they will not seek to oppress others.

Hopefully, these stories and the discussions you have about them with colleagues and friends will stimulate your thinking. It is now up to you to develop your own response to the question Ahmed raises. Perhaps you will design encounters between people from more and less powerful communities in ways that minimize the ethical risks and maximize the ethical possibilities. Perhaps you will come up with alternative courses of action altogether. You may discover that you now have new questions and more complex thoughts about this dilemma, each requiring further exploration.
A Note on Integrity

The work of peacebuilding — facilitating coexistence dialogues, working towards reconciliation, mediating or negotiating between communities — will almost inevitably raise ethical questions, tensions and dilemmas. To do this work with integrity — to know where we stand without being too rigid, to make thoughtful and informed contributions to a community of co-deliberators — requires as a first step that we acknowledge doubts and put words to the ethical tensions we experience.

If you have made your way to this point in the guidebook, you realize that embarking on such an inquiry is no small matter. Often, the first step in identifying and addressing ethical questions is telling stories about our experiences. In many cases, the events that call for a story are unsettling. As we shape experiences into stories, we discover and in some sense determine their meanings. We can often arrive at the ethical dimension of experiences by reflecting on the thoughts and feelings our experiences have evoked in us.

Have your experiences as a peacebuilder left you with ethical questions? Might the methods we practiced in this chapter help you to understand your questions more deeply and begin to imagine answers? As we saw in the case of Ahmed’s question, sometimes the resolution to an ethical dilemma can be found in integrating values and finding live ethical alternatives. Sometimes we find a kind of resolution by reframing the question we started out asking.

Faced with a situation similar to Ahmed’s, what choices would you make? Are there questions from your own peacebuilding practice waiting to be addressed?
Notes


If you would like to learn more about Seeds of Peace, the camp where Tariq participated in coexistence sessions, you can read a book by the camp's founder, John Wallach: The Enemy has a Face: The Seeds of Peace Experience, Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, 2000. You might also explore the organization's website: www.seedsofpeace.org

Jean Hampton and Jeffrie Murphy engage in an extended "conversation" about anger in their book Forgiveness and Mercy, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988. The quotation from Murphy can be found on pages 16 - 18; from Hampton on page 146.


A note to readers:
This resource listing will be updated regularly on the website of The International Center for Ethics, Justice and Public Life http://www.brandeis.edu/ethics/. We welcome suggestions from discussion leaders and users of the guidebook.

Philosophical Texts
In relation to the pragmatist mode of ethical inquiry, discussion leaders and teachers are strongly encouraged to review texts by Anthony Weston, especially A 21st Century Ethical Toolbox.


Peacebuilding, Coexistence and Conflict Resolution Texts
In relation to facilitating encounters in contexts of power asymmetry:


In relation to dialogue and other coexistence efforts in the Middle East:


In relation to reconciliation:


**Literary Works**


**Websites**

• The Brandies Initiative in Intercommunal Coexistence:
  http://www.brandeis.edu/ethics/coexistence.

• The Compassionate Listening Project was initiated in 1997 to invite regular citizens to play a greater role in Israeli-Palestinian reconciliation: http://www.mideastdiplomacy.org/elp.html. Essays and articles on compassionate listening and reconciliation are available through the project online: http://www.coopcomm.org/listening.htm.

• Peacequest is an oral history project which presents a mosaic of experiences and perspectives on the Palestine-Israel conflict: http://www.peacequest.org.

• Seeds of Peace summer camp, an international camp for conflict resolution, can be found on through the Seeds of Peace homepage: http://www.seedsofpeace.org.

• The United States Institute of Peace maintains a library designed to support the research needs of peacebuilding practitioners: http://www.usip.org/library.html.

**Videos and Documentaries**


Educators and discussion leaders are encouraged to adapt the material included in the chapter, the resource list and the additional readings to suit the interests, needs and capacities of their students.

If participants or students were unfamiliar with the Middle East conflict, it might be useful to screen *Peace of Mind* or another video that shows the lives of regular people on each side of the conflict.

Please note that the worksheets within the chapter include steps that are necessary to the inquiry that is the focus of the chapter. The questions in boxes are important but optional. They are engaging and reflective, designed to help students think through their own opinions and experiences prior to reading about the opinions and experiences of others.

Workshops can be structured around a subset of the questions, readings and worksheets included in the chapter. Each set of questions and each worksheet can become the basis for a whole class discussion, small group discussions or exercises. Workshop participants can explore their own experiences and feelings through individual writing and/or sharing in dyads or small groups.

It is helpful to read the stories aloud, especially when working with groups where English is not the first language and where educational levels are mixed. It is possible to assign small groups different texts — first when thinking about ethical possibilities and risks associated with encounters between members of more and less powerful communities; and again, later in the chapter, when imagining live ethical alternatives. Each of these stories begins on a fresh page, so multiple copies can be produced for workshop participants.

Students or workshop participants can take on the roles of the four scholars whose opinions on ‘anger’ were represented in this chapter and engage in a panel discussion on the question: “Should oppressed people empathize with their oppressors?” Other participants can be divided up into ‘advisory teams’ mandated to support each of the scholars in preparing their statements. The ‘scholars’ and their ‘advisors’ can prepare by reading and discussing longer works by each author, cited in the end notes and resource pages.

Members of the ‘advisory groups’ could meet in groups of four — each an expert on one of the four different conceptions of anger — to discuss “live ethical alternatives” to Ahmed’s dilemma.

The additional reading that follows this section reveals a dilemma in some sense parallel to the question raised by Ahmed. In it, a progressive American rabbi asks: “Should people with ties to an occupying state publicly criticize unethical actions taken by members of the occupied community?” Participants in workshops or students could be encouraged to work through the steps of ethical inquiry outlined in this chapter in relation to that complementary dilemma.

Participants in workshops or in college undergraduate or graduate courses could be assigned to engage in a parallel inquiry about an ethical question of their choice as they work through the steps to the inquiry outlined in this chapter.
The following letter is by Rabbi Arthur Waskow of the Shalom Center in Philadelphia. It was emailed in the summer of 2001 to a large number of pro-peace Jewish Americans and Israelis. The letter addresses a dilemma that in many ways complements the ethical issue posed by Ahmed. It asks: “Should people with ties to an occupying state criticize members of the occupied community when they commit acts deemed to be grossly unethical?”

Rabbi Waskow makes his position clear. What do you think? Can you use the methods outlined in this chapter to construct an opinion of your own?

Dear Chevra [Friends],

I want to raise again the question of whether the Jewish movement to end the Occupation should be opposing not only the occupation itself as a huge and continuous act of violence, but also attacks against unarmed civilians when carried out by Palestinian groups, as well as such attacks by the Israeli armed forces and Israeli settlers.

In my own view, the movements for peace and justice should vigorously criticize violence against civilians by Palestinians as well as by Israelis.

For example, there are plans for a High Holy Day event in NYC that will — as so far planned — criticize only the Occupation and address only the Israeli mission.

I urge that primarily for philosophical and secondarily for tactical-political reasons, such events also explicitly address those branches of Palestinian society that sponsor such terrorist attacks against unarmed civilians as the suicide bombings.

The main argument of those who oppose doing this, or who mute beneath audibility their criticism of even this kind of violence when it comes from Palestinians, is that the relationship between Israel and Palestine is not symmetrical. Israel has overwhelming power and is using it in an occupation that is one huge and continuous act of violence.

I agree. But it seems to me this asymmetry does not justify attacks against unarmed civilians, nor require silence about such terrorism from a movement for peace and justice.

It seems to me entirely possible to speak out against such terrorism when it is carried out by Palestinians, while at the same time making clear that the power relationship and the injustice relationship between the two peoples is not symmetrical.

I have written, spoken and vigilled from just such a position, and therefore know it can be done.

First, the philosophical and ethical issues:

As near as I can tell, the only standpoint from which it could be suggested that the murder of unarmed civilians is not vile is one that says the end (in this case, frightening Israelis into awareness of Palestinian rage and determination, and reducing the tourist flow so as to hurt the Israeli economy) justifies the means.

Or more broadly, that whatever an oppressed people does — whatever it does — in the attempt to end its oppression is legitimate.

Some people may believe that such forms of violence are indeed vile, while believing that only the oppressed can publicly express any judgment about what
means they may use to end the oppression. This boils down to the assertion that there
is no universal standard whatever that can be asserted between cultures, at least
between “oppressed” and “oppressor” cultures, that can ethically decide between
different forms of behavior.

As regards the first outlook:

To me it seems clear that a politics severed from ethics, a politics in which “the
ends” are said to justify “the means,” becomes an unethical, antiethical, brutal,
destructive, dehumanizing, tyrannical politics.

As Martin Buber wrote in “Recollection of a death” (in his book Pointing the
Way): “I cannot conceive of anything real corresponding to the saying that ‘the end
‘sanctifies’ the means; but I mean something which is real in the highest sense of the
term when I say that the means profane, actually make meaningless, the end, that is,
its realization! What is realized is the farther from the goal that was set, the more out
of accord with it is the method by which it was realized.”

In other words: the further the means you use deviate from the end you envision,
the further the end you actually reach will deviate from the vision you held out.

The use by either Israel or the nascent Palestine of terror, torture, bombings,
demolition of homes, sieges, assassinations, and the like becomes part of the fabric
of the society. Those committed to a Jewish state, to a free Palestine, to a just and
peaceful world, should condemn such actions for their ethical corruption—as well as
for what they create politically.

In Jewish terms, we can choose to draw on the traditions of —

“All human beings are made in the image of God,”

“God created the human race through one person so that no one could say, ‘My
family, my nation, my race is more noble than yours’;”

“Justice, justice shall you pursue: Why ‘justice’ twice? — To teach that a just
goal be achieved by just means, and that justice for myself and justice for the other go
hand in hand”;

“What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor”; and

“If I am not for myself, who will be? If I am for myself only, what am I? And if
not now, when?”

These teachings are Jewishly rooted and universally addressed.
Secondly, terrorism is a political act, with deeply disastrous political
consequences.

Uri Avneri, one of the most stalwart of Israelis committed to peace and justice,
and an opponent of the occupation from practically the instant of its beginning in
1967, spoke this way after the Dolphinarium bombing:

“For me, the front line does not pass between Israelis and Palestinians, but
between the Israeli and Palestinian peace lovers on one side and the warmongers
of both peoples on the other...

The suicide bomber who blew himself up among the boys and girls at the
Dolphinsarium discotheque on the sea-shore of Tel-Aviv did a great service to the
settlers, who are trying to convince the Israeli public that it is not because of them that
the rivers of blood are flowing and that there is no difference between the settlements
and Tel-Aviv...
The collaboration between the Islamic fanatics and the extreme right-wing in Israel is a fact of life, as is the cooperation between the likes of Faisal and the Israeli peace activists...

In the ping-pong game between Rehavam Ze’evi and Sheikh Yassin, Hizbullah and the settlers, the ball is a human skull.

Implicit in Avenery’s remarks is the near-certainty that by now all the major players know that the “rules of the deadly ping-pong game” are what Avenery said. That is, the Sharon government knows that every assassination results not in an end to terrorism but in its increase; every Hamas leader knows that every suicide bombing increases the rage in Israel, and brings on the next Israeli attack. Both these parties are pro-war parties. One thinks they can win the war in the short run, the other that they can win the war in the long run. Both welcome the war.

Why should a movement for peace and justice refrain from condemning a political act like the Dolphinarium bombing that is both vile in its ethics and destructive in its politics?

What about the political impact of speaking out as Avenery did??

Making clear that we view Israeli lives as precious, just as we view Palestinian lives; making clear that we can recognize warlike intentions and acts perpetrated by some Palestinians just as we recognize them when some Israelis perpetrate them—this bespeaks our own clarity and honesty, and is likely to invite more open listening from Jews as well as from the world in general.

Some activists refuse to speak at all the truth about the terrorism that comes from some Palestinian groups because Jewish officials speak endlessly about it.

What I propose instead is not lying because our opponents will be attracted by the lie, but telling the truth even though our opponents will be attracted by that aspect of the truth.

Why not? If they hear us speak some truth they can identify with, they are more likely to listen to us speaking the truths they don’t like.

So if we oppose and criticize terrorism, what can we say about how to prevent it? The official answer of the Israeli government has been: with more violence. But we have already seen that draconic blockades, sieges, and bombings fail to stop such vile actions as the Tel Aviv bombing. What would enhance the chances of stopping terrorism—without a guarantee, all life is a gamble—is a serious peace.

We may have among us somewhat different versions of how to describe that peace, but they all include the end of the Occupation — that the way to peace is through acts of peace, not domination.

Such a peace would redirect energy into society-building instead of rage and hatred. It might for a brief period also bring about a burst of terrorist attempts just as agreement is near, as has happened in the past, for the precise purpose of preventing agreement. Within its own boundaries, Israel would certainly be correct in taking the measures any state would take to prevent terrorism.

All of us who are committed to justice, to peace, to the safety and freedom of Israel as well as the emerging Palestine, ought to insist on incorporating this perspective into all actions for peace. Where we vigil and what our signs say matters.

First, it matters that we say to fellow Jews that we care about Jewish lives and
that our concern for ending the occupation is not a mask for hostility to Israel but an expression of our Jewish values. That stance is far more likely to allow most Jews to hear us in our critique of Israeli policy.

Second, it matters to Palestinians for us to say that precisely in our respect for their demand for self-determination, we respect their ability to choose responsible rather than irresponsible behavior for getting there.

Third, it matters to all the world that we urge distinctions be made between those who seek justice by just means, and those who seek justice by unjust means.

Is it legitimate for "outsiders" (let alone Jews, who are not outsiders to this struggle) to choose between different currents in the struggle for justice and against oppression?

The world chose between the nonviolent resistance of Gandhi and the violent resistance of Bose in the struggle for Indian independence, between the limited (almost entirely anti-property) "violence" of the African National Congress and the anti-civilian violence of the Pan-Africanist Congress, between militant nonviolent movements of American farmers and workers against oppressive state and corporate power, and the violence of Timothy McVeigh.

So, too, the world should be able to choose between the suicide bombings and those Palestinians like the Center for Rapprochement (Beit Sahour) who have joined alongside militantly pro-peace Israelis like Bat Shalom to resist nonviolently the occupation.

What about broader questions of violence that go beyond attacks on unarmed civilians? This is far less clear. It could be argued that only pacifists stand in a place where they can urge an oppressed people to eschew all violence.

The strongest and most authentic way of encouraging nonviolence is to join with Palestinians in nonviolent resistance to the Occupation—as Rabbis for Human Rights, Bat Shalom, and the Israel Committee against House Demolition have been doing.

All this is not easy. Seeking justice, pursuing peace, rarely is. In the same essay quoted above, Buber also wrote:

"The true front runs through the licentious soldiery, the true front runs through the revolutionary, the true front runs through each party, through each group and each member of a group.

On the true front each fights against his fellows and against himself. [Of those who do so] it is said that they have weakened the battle strength; [but it is they] who have kept alive the truth of the battle."

Those of us who urge that our movement affirm the choosing of just and peaceful means to achieve just and peaceful ends, may seem to be weakening the "battle strength"—but perhaps we are keeping alive the truth of what this battle is all about.

Shalom, Arthur

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Director, The Shalom Center
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When Should We Refrain from Speaking?

- Identifying the Ethical Issue
- Identifying Ethical Possibilities and Risks
- Exploring Concepts: What Do We Mean by Trust?
- Examining Assumptions: What Kind of Relationships are We Seeking to Build?
- Cultivating Trust
- The Question of Integrity
- Making Choices in the Face of the Dilemma
When Should We Refrain from Speaking?

Nourishing relationships is at the core of building peace. As practitioners who facilitate coexistence and further reconciliation, we are often confronted with the challenge of building trusting relationships after a history of reciprocal injury, disrespect and deceit.

Helping adversaries build confidence in each other when we are outsiders to the communities in conflict can be quite a challenge. In that situation, we often build trusting relationships with people on each side of the conflict, and then use the confidence we have earned to bring the parties into relationship with each other.

When we work as peacebuilders in our own regions, however, or when we have strong affiliations with one of the communities in the conflict, the challenge of establishing trusting relationships can be much more complex. In this case, we work especially hard to become aware of our own biases, to monitor them, and to minimize how they might intrude on our work. On the other hand, we need to take care not to “bend over backward” too far to win acceptance from “the other side.” To be sure, there are risks that our interventions will reflect the assumptions and interests of our own community. There are complementary risks that our desire to be accepted by a former enemy might influence our interventions in the opposite direction.

In order to nourish trust in a fragile relationship, as both insiders and outsiders to conflicts, we sometimes focus on listening intensely, becoming very judicious about whether, when, and how to reveal our own opinions about sensitive issues. This strategy creates particular challenges for peacebuilders who are insiders to the conflict.

When we are outsiders to a conflict, we can listen receptively to each community’s narrative without the likelihood of having to question any of our own most cherished beliefs. In most cases, everyone in the conflict system with whom we interact understands that our primary role is that of peacebuilder. Their expectations of us as speakers and listeners are based on our presence in that role. These expectations might shift depending on whether the process requires us to work as teacher, mediator, healer, facilitator or witness. But we can choose temporarily to withhold our own opinions, knowing that later, when we return to our own communities, we can share our thoughts and feelings openly, with minimal risk of jeopardizing relationships with neighbors, colleagues and family members.

Experiences as an “Outsider” Facilitating Trust between Adversary Communities

Before we consider practitioners’ stories about refraining from speaking their minds in order to establish relationships of trust, take a few moments to reflect on your own experiences as an outsider facilitating trust between members of adversary communities.

- What are your experiences in facilitating trusting relationships between members of adversary communities when you were an outsider to the conflict?

- Have you ever withheld your own thoughts, feelings and opinions in that context in order to nurture a tenuous relationship? What happened? How have you felt about those choices in retrospect?
By contrast, when we belong to a community that is party to the conflict, decisions about when and how to listen and speak are more difficult. We engage as peacebuilders while also being seen as friends, colleagues and members of our families and communities. The obligations and expectations associated with these other roles sometimes conflict with what is required of us as a peacebuilder. Furthermore, when we listen receptively to the narratives and perspectives of people who have been adversaries of our own communities, it is quite likely that some of our own cherished myths and beliefs will be brought into question. This can create a kind of disorientation, a confusion that might ultimately be productive but is nevertheless uncomfortable. When we are simultaneously peacebuilder and friend, when the families and colleagues we “return” to are also members of the conflict system, a decision to refrain from speaking our mind can create tensions — within us and in our relationships.

The story that is the centerpiece of this chapter explores both the possibilities and risks associated with refraining from speaking one’s mind. It is told by a peacebuilder who works to put an end to violence in his own country, Sri Lanka. Understanding his dilemma challenges us to think more deeply — not only about the distinct ethical challenges of working as insiders and outsiders — but also about the meaning of trust and the nature of the relationships we seek to build.

While we are exploring the question of when and whether we should refrain from speaking, we will also be practicing a mode of ethical inquiry. Specifically, we will be:

- Identifying an ethical issue
- Identifying ethical possibilities and risks
- Exploring concepts
- Examining assumptions
- Integrating values by exploring what is right about opposing views
- Integrating values by imagining feasible alternatives

This inquiry is meant to be useful to peacebuilding practitioners both because of the issues it explores and the method of inquiry it exemplifies. The method is one that can be adapted to your own issues and questions.
Identifying the Ethical Issue

The following story, told by Sanath, a Sinhalese Sri Lankan peacebuilder, reveals some of the dilemmas and tensions that emerged when he tried to strengthen tenuous relationships and build trust with Tamil counterparts by refraining from speaking his mind. His self-awareness, and the candor with which he reveals his inner processes both during particular encounters and in retrospect, are especially helpful to us in considering the ethical possibilities and risks inherent in refraining from speaking in order to nourish trust.
Losing My Sense of What is Right and Wrong

One dilemma I grapple with personally is when to raise issues that might damage a tenuous trust I am developing with someone from the Tamil community. I try to avoid getting into debates, because I know that I’m not that good at it, and I can easily get emotionally caught up in the debate. Also, I know that whatever points are made there don’t matter that much in the end. I’d rather allow what is, in my view, a slightly biased version of the real picture than create a fight or an uproar or risk damaging a relationship with a Tamil colleague. Usually I prefer the other person to have his say rather than have to fight the particular issue. But I also find I use it, in a way, to disarm the other side.

For instance, I once participated in a conflict resolution course for forty people from different parts of the world, hosted by an international hotel in Tunisia. There was one Tamil person who was always taunting me and pricking little pins and barbs into me with his comments. So when it came time to plan a twenty-minute presentation on our country, I told this Tamil to speak for fifteen minutes and, if there’s something to be added, any of the rest of us will add something. He was taken aback—and actually his presentation was pretty bad because he went far into history and spoke for half an hour. Afterward he said that he thought that I had come to push a line for the Sinhalese, to justify the Sinhalese position. But after he was given the opportunity to tell the story of Sri Lanka from his perspective, his message to me changed a lot. So what if those forty people go away with a wrong impression? For me that doesn’t matter nearly so much as that my relationship with him improved and would lead to work together in the future.

There was another instance at an international institute when Murali, another Tamil colleague, become really emotional when Gene Sharp, an advocate of non-violence, raised objections to the Tamil strategy that includes the use of violence. I actually sympathize with Gene’s view that after the Tamils resorted to violence many more have suffered or been killed. Before the Tamils took up arms there were periodic riots in which tens, twenties, maybe hundreds were killed. A thousand may have been killed in a major riot in 1983. That was the biggest one and according to government figures maybe 400 Tamils were killed, but no one is really sure of the figure. But after they became militant [violent], the repression became massive. Twenty-five percent of the Tamil population left the country.

I believe Gene Sharp, that maybe if there had been an equivalent kind of commitment to nonviolence the level of destruction of Tamil land, Tamil property and Tamil lives would be much less. But my Tamil colleague did not see it that way. He made the point that after the Tigers took up arms, the riots against the Tamils stopped. He said that before they took up arms they were getting killed, but after they were not getting killed. But actually the Tamil people are getting killed much more by the State, by the army. He was focusing on civilian against civilian, and that has stopped. But it has been replaced by the army killing civilians. But if I pointed that out, Murali might have gotten
heated. So that’s the main reason I didn’t want to state my opinion at that time.

But the second reason is that the Tamil side of the story is not being heard. Five years ago it was being expressed, but it isn’t now. So I’m representing a side that, in effect, has gotten its story out. So why should I try to put spokes into the Tamil story? The largest reason not to state my opinion is that I didn’t want the session to degenerate into squabbling and damage my relationship with Murali.

The question is, though, when do you raise certain issues when they might jeopardize an important interpersonal relationship? My tendency would be to preserve the relationship and wait for the opportunity to make the real points. In this case, I did show a video in a later session, which brought out the Muslim issue, and there were other opportunities in some of the sessions we had. I was telling others, but Murali was also present. So I was able to communicate my point of view in a more subtle way. And I know he listens, because we do talk about these issues afterward, and I also listen to what he says.

When Murali talks, I get a sense of how the people in the Northeast feel. They will not grumble if the LTTE kills mayors, because they see these mayors as agents of the army, and the army is occupying them and they are fighting a war. They understand that the mayors are actually there to legitimize the presence of the army. In the same way we will not grumble if the LTTE kills army people because they are fighting a war.

Basically the Tamil logic is very difficult for people who are outside the Northeast, or even foreigners, to accept. So, thanks to Murali, I have a better sense of how people in the Northeast feel. Now Murali did not communicate this directly to me. It happened that there was a third party, a journalist – she was part of the Burgher community, descendants of the Portuguese and the Dutch – and she was raising the question about the mayors. Now maybe because I was there, he was willing to say those things, and maybe he also trusted the journalist because of my presence. Maybe this would have been too intense for us to do one-on-one. The journalist as a third person lessened the emotional intensity of the whole thing.

But I have a problem if I tell this story to people in my office or in my family. They can’t accept the legitimacy of killing elected mayors, and they get upset. They say that I’m supporting the LTTE, which to them is a very bad thing. But then I have to say, “Well, those are the people we are trying to make peace with.” I start losing my sense of what is acceptable, of what is right and what is wrong. That is another type of dilemma I face.

We must note first the temporary nature of Sanath’s decision to nourish a fragile relationship by withholding his own opinion. While he chose not to contradict a Tamil colleague in public, he looked for later opportunities to share his own views, such as when he has the support of the presence of a third person. Nevertheless, he still experienced as a dilemma the question about when to raise issues that might damage a relationship. And, he speaks of another problem, perhaps related: after making an effort to listen openly to a viewpoint he opposes he starts to lose his own sense of what is right and what is wrong. ☝️
Identifying Ethical Possibilities and Risks

The chart on the following page summarizes the ethical possibilities and risks, as they are expressed in Sanath’s story, of refraining from speaking one’s own mind in order to build a trusting relationship. See if you can enter into the chart any additional possibilities or risks that should be taken into account, based on your own experiences and/or on conversations with colleagues and friends.
Refraining from Speaking One’s Mind
When Seeking to Build Trusting Relationships with Adversaries — #1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethical Possibilities</th>
<th>Ethical Risks</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Avoids potentially adversarial debate, fight or uproar. <em>(Sanath)</em></td>
<td>- The one who refrains from speaking her own mind starts to lose her own sense of what is right and wrong. <em>(Sanath)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Avoids damaging a tenuous trust. (Complete and honest exchange of ideas might be too intense for relationship to bear, cutting off future contact.) <em>(Sanath)</em></td>
<td>Other Risks:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Improves relationship, leading to work together in the future. <em>(Sanath)</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>- Allows less prevalent narrative to be heard. <em>(Sanath)</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>- Allows others to understand the logic within the less prevalent narrative. <em>(Sanath)</em></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>- Allows for possibility of communication in a safer space, i.e. when a third party is present. <em>(Sanath)</em></td>
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Other Possibilities:
Considering the Dynamics of Power

When trying to imagine the ethical possibilities and risks associated with a particular course of action, it is usually helpful to consider a range of different perspectives. In this section, we'll consider the opinions of several philosophers and peacebuilding practitioners who address one of Sanath's points: that refraining from speaking allows the less prevalent narrative to be heard. He is referring to a consequence of the disparities in political and military power that define the overall context in which his communication with Murali takes place.

What have others said about the responsibilities and challenges of communication across differences in power? By reviewing some of this literature, we will be able to add to the list of possibilities and risks associated with refraining from speech in order to build relationships of trust with adversaries.

Nicholas Burbules and Suzanne Rice, two educational philosophers, make a strong argument in support of Sanath's strategy.

When possible, communicative situations of difference also need to be entered with a sense of the context and personal histories that inform the various parties' outlooks on the situation. Stereotypes about the other parties to a discussion, or degrees of skepticism that might be based on failures experienced in previous attempts, cannot be wished away. Prior experiences may have created feelings of intimidation, resentment, and hurt; an imposition of silence, or self-imposed habit of silence, may be ingrained in some of the participants. Conversely, prior experiences may also have created feelings of superiority and a tendency to silence others.

Such factors, especially when they become self-perpetuating, can be serious barriers to successful communication. One starting point in overcoming such barriers is eliciting and honoring the self-expressions of previously silenced partners. This effort can be self-generating: attaining some degree of successful self-expression and mutual understanding creates, in part, the conditions of confidence and trust in which future attempts might be carried further (just as failures can reinforce skepticism about the possibility of success, or the value of even trying.)

Dwight Boyd, an educational philosopher who explores ethical questions related to pluralism and diversity, connects the responsibility to listen actively even more directly to questions of relative power and privilege. Active listening, he writes, "is expected in direct proportion to the relative privilege of the voice in question." In his view, when persons coming from the more powerful community take greater responsibility to listen, they help avoid the danger of incorporating the oppressive dynamics into the relationship itself. The talk is structured in ways that counteract the unequal distribution of social power in the larger context. But Boyd does not settle for commending active listening alone; he also suggests that the more powerful person refrain from speaking. Boyd argues that the one with more power needs to "shut up" in order to counteract the "force built right into the voice" in which his or her views are expressed. Only if those with more privilege restrain themselves from using it will there be even the possibility of an uncoerced agreement.

So with Dwight Boyd's help, we can add to Sanath's list of ethical possibilities the idea that refraining from speaking can counteract the unequal distribution of social power in the larger context and in some ways can promote equity in the relationship itself. (We have added this idea on the worksheet that follows this section.)
We have now generated a long list of ethical possibilities associated with refraining from speech in order to avoid jeopardizing a tenuous relationship. What about risks? Can we imagine any other risks besides the ethical confusion that Sanath mentions?

For instance, when we refrain from acknowledging an opinion our counterpart might not share, we run the risk of being or appearing to be paternalistic, of making judgments on behalf of our counterparts of what information they “can handle.” After all, honesty itself communicates a kind of respect. We might discover our counterparts have a greater tolerance for disagreement than we at first thought. Furthermore, the person whose trust we seek might react as negatively to our withholding information as to the specific content of the information withheld. Our conversation partners might end up feeling manipulated and disrespected when, at some later point, they realize we have been refraining from speaking our minds and revealing attitudes different from their own. How will they know when they can trust us to speak openly in the future?

Perhaps our counterpart, however tenuous the connection, is entitled to full information about our position. With that information, she will be able to make her own judgment about how much and in what ways we are trustworthy. Ironically, although we might refrain from speech in order to counteract imbalances in power, withholding our own views can result in perpetuating its own kind of control. When we refrain from speaking, we remove the opportunity for others to comment critically on our point of view.

If we refrain from speaking our opinions for too long, we deprive the relationship of the benefit of both partners having access to as complete information as possible — including the extent to which the partners differ from each other. The relationship can actually suffer because, although it might be indirect, when we refrain from speaking our minds, we risk communicating our distrust of the relationship to be strong enough to tolerate conflict and differences of opinion.

Thinking through the ethical risks of refraining from speaking leads to the realization that not raising difficult issues can jeopardize a relationship — perhaps as much or more than raising them. In other words, it is possible that the very gestures we make to communicate respect (i.e. listening) and to enhance the development of trust (i.e. refraining from speaking) might, in fact, have the opposite effects. It is also very possible that, over time, the energy required to maintain an important silence becomes too burdensome.

If we can’t find some way to express our thoughts and feelings, we might find ourselves withdrawing from the relationship or continuing it only in a circumscribed way. Sanath himself understands that silences can remove the energy from relationships; it is partly for that reason that he seeks safe opportunities to share his perspective, such as when third parties are present.

In addition to whatever points you and your colleagues might have added to the chart of ethical possibilities and risks, we can add several items from this brief reflection. We now have quite a substantial list of both ethical possibilities and risks noted on the worksheet on the following page.

"It is possible that the very gestures we make to communicate respect...and to enhance the development of trust...might, in fact, have the opposite effects."
### Ethical Possibilities

- Avoids potentially adversarial debate, flight or uproar. *(Sanath)*
- Avoids damaging tenuous trust. *(Complete and honest exchange of ideas might be too intense for relationship to bear, cutting off future contact.)* *(Sanath)*
- Improves relationship, leading to work together in the future. *(Sanath)*
- Allows less prevalent narrative to be heard. *(Sanath)*
- Allows others to understand the logic within the less prevalent narrative. *(Sanath)*
- Allows for possibility of communication in a safer space, i.e. when a third party is present. *(Sanath)*
- Counteracts the unequal distribution of social power in the larger context and to some degree protects the relationship itself from the inequity. *(Boyd)*

Other Possibilities:

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### Ethical Risks

- The one who refrains from speaking her own mind starts to lose her own sense of what is right and wrong. *(Sanath)*
- We risk being paternalistic, disrespecting our conversation partners and/or leading them to feel manipulated.
- Withholding our own views can be a way of exerting control.
- We risk communicating our distrust of the relationship, thereby undermining the capacity of the relationship to sustain itself in the face of differences.
- Silences can result in withdrawal from, or loss of energy to, the relationship.

Other Risks:

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Exploring Concepts: What Do We Mean by ‘Trust’?

Now that we have developed a substantial list of ethical possibilities and risks associated with refraining from speaking, how shall we decide on a course of action? How do we decide, in any particular circumstance, when to raise sensitive issues? We make choices, of course, based on many details, including the personalities involved, the volatility of the issue, the cost of losing contact with a particular person, etc. But we might make better decisions on the spot if we step back to think about what ‘trust’ means and the nature of the relationship we hope to build.

Sanath indicates that he is concerned about damaging a tenuous trust. What, precisely, is trust?

Before we read what others are thinking, take a few moments to think about the meaning of ‘trust’ and ‘trustworthiness.’ Discuss your thoughts with colleagues and friends.

Questions About Trust

• What is trust?

• Think of someone you trust as a friend. Think of someone you trust as a colleague. Think of someone you trust as a partner in dialogue. In each relationship, what does it mean to trust?

• As a peacebuilder, how do you go about establishing trust between members of adversary communities?

• As a member of a community in conflict, have you ever tried to build a trusting relationship with a counterpart from the ‘adversary’ community? How did you go about it? What were the results of your efforts?

Questions About Trustworthiness

• How do we elicit the trustworthiness of someone we do not yet know?

• Have you encountered people who are trustworthy in some respects but not other respects?

• Thinking of your relationships with people form adversary communities, how would you describe your own trustworthiness?

• How would your counterparts from the other community describe your trustworthiness?
Conceptions of Trust

What, precisely, is trust? As soon as we begin to think about trust, we inevitably become aware of what a complex concept it is. Trust can refer either to an attitude toward a particular person or process or to a more general disposition. It varies in terms of degree: we can trust a person completely, or selectively, or not at all. It also varies in kind: we can trust particular people in certain ways: to be present, to be honest, to be careful, to have good intentions, to be competent, etc. The philosopher Trudy Govier writes that when we trust a friend:

We believe that she is likely to act kindly and benevolently towards us, that she is unlikely to harm us, certainly would not deliberately harm us, that she is well-disposed toward us. We expect our friend to lend a sympathetic ear, to co-operate in making joint arrangements, to help out in a time of crisis. There are many terrible things people can do to each other, and when we trust a friend we assume confidently — without thinking of it — that she will not do any of these things. We assume that she will not break confidences, tell our secrets, abuse our children, or try to steal our job. To trust a friend is to believe that her motivations (towards ourselves) emerge from affection, care, and concern, and not from dislike, ambition, or egoism.

Trust also involves a sense of the other’s competence. If we trust a friend to give advice, or care for our house pet, we believe that she is capable of doing these tasks. If we trust her to give us comments on an essay, we believe that she is competent to do the job and that she will do it with integrity, with our best interests at heart.

The capacity to trust appears to be inborn, and developed at the earliest stages of life in response to reliable parenting, and from functions such as feeding and other aspects of care. Basic trust in the world is essential to healthy human development; and its absence is likely to lead to severe emotional disturbances, such as schizophrenia.

According to the philosopher Annette Baier, trust “is accepted vulnerability to another’s power to harm one, a power inseparable from the power to look after some aspect of one’s good.” Trust involves placing ourselves or something we value at risk of being hurt or damaged, believing that the other party could inflict harm but will choose not to. We often take such risks because we need other people’s help to care for the people, the things, the ideas and the institutions that we value.

Baier theorizes that not all trust is good. If people are intent on suppressing us, or keeping us subservient or ignorant, our trust in them, in Baier’s terms, would not be “warranted.” On the contrary, it would be appropriate to “distrust” a person who intends us harm or who treats us with disrespect.

In a situation of war or oppression, the choice to distrust “the other” often will be seen as appropriate, or warranted, given that adversaries often are intent on injuring each other. In Baier’s view, it would be foolish to trust someone who plans on harming us, or who would rejoice at our suffering, or who seeks to meet his own needs in ways that violate our rights. When we move to a phase of coexistence or building peace, we hope that the intention to harm has ended. Yet, according to Baier’s theory, unqualified trust would still appear not be warranted if others lack the skill, capacity, knowledge or will to avoid injuring us.
In the peacebuilding fields, our work often requires us to focus not so much on whether trust is warranted, but on what can be done to interrupt the cycle of reciprocal injury and distrust that is at the core of a conflict system. In this regard, it will be useful to review what is understood about the effects of violence on people’s capacity to trust.

The Effects of Violence on the Capacity to Trust

For children who grow up in contexts of protracted ethnic violence and the apparent powerlessness of the adults responsible for their care, the world does not warrant their trust. It cannot meet their most fundamental needs for safety and for a sense of justice. Such children grow up with a prevailing sense of helplessness, “not ameliorated through observations of parental efficacy,” and cannot move beyond the stage of impotent rage. The psychological scars of such violence lead some of those children to assert their personhood, their identity, through acts of terror. And so begin intra-ethnic and inter-ethnic cycles of fear, rage and aggression — cycles that are difficult to interrupt, even when “objective” circumstances change.

According to Joseph Montville:

...ethnic victimization is a state of individual and collective ethnic mind that occurs when the traditional structures that provide an individual sense of security and self-worth are shattered by aggressive, violent political outsiders. Victimhood can be characterized by either an extreme or persistent low-level sense of mortal vulnerability.

Individuals identify with ethnic victimhood when they suffer personally from an episode of physical violence. A sense of victimization ensues when the violence directed against them or their group is clearly unjustifiable, when the assault represents a continuous threat, and when it generates a basic fear of annihilation. Just as torture can leave an indelible psychological scar, so the experience of victimization can lead to seemingly permanent effects, including a “readiness to commit violence without remorse.” According to the clinical psychologist Jeanne Knutson, who interviewed hundreds of victims of political violence, in the United States, Ireland, Iran, Cyprus and the Middle East:

One never erases the identity of a victim. The first blows make the victim permanently on guard for the next attack by the victimizer. Even if the latter — a tribe, another ethnic group or nation — loses power or the ability to mount a credible threat, the victim’s fear continues even if diminished. A life-preserving, primitive belief in personal safety has been breached. Once having been terrorized, a victim thus simultaneously grieves over the past and fears the future. At base, this intense anxiety over future loss is driven by the semi-conscious inner knowledge that passivity ensures victimization. The genesis of political violence ... is the belief that...only continued activity in defense of one’s self (one’s group) adequately serves to reduce the threat of further aggression against the self.

Violence can impair not only our ability or willingness to trust, but even more profoundly, it can impair our capacity to discern when trust is warranted. Part of the work of peacebuilding is to restore people’s capacity to trust, and their ability to discern when it is appropriate to begin to trust.
Vulnerability, Peacebuilding and Trust

Is it possible to call forth in someone an attitude of trust, or to restore in someone the capacity to trust, once it has been impaired?

The philosopher H.J.N. Horsburg describes “therapeutic trust:” bringing out the best in someone known to be untrustworthy by placing one’s own trust in that person. Horsburg suggests that trust gives “moral space” to people and provides the conditions in which people can develop as ethical beings. In this regard, in some cases it might be our responsibility to trust others, even when they have not warranted it in the past. An attitude of “systematic and pervasive distrust” is morally wrong, he argues, because it denies a person’s status as a moral agent.

The African peacebuilder Dr. Hizkias Assefa describes calling forth another’s trust and trustworthiness through his own vulnerability.

Peacebuilding is a very deep process of communication. It is a process of trust-building so that a person allows you to talk to them in ways that they have not considered before — or that they have considered and rejected — and eventually says, “Yes, I hear you. I would like to give peace a chance. But these are my fears if we were to do this. What can you do to help me address my fear so that when I try this new way, I will not be hurt again?” These fears are very legitimate, and the whole point of such mediation is to get people to understand and share their fears with each other, and recognize what is founded and unfounded. If there is a founded fear, then I try to get people to work together to deal with that fear, rather than to continue to reinforce that fear.

The steps are not easy; and they take a long time...In a very strange way, sometimes vulnerability is also a source of power. For example, when first track mediators and diplomats go to conflict areas to offer their services they bring bodyguards. But, when people like me are involved, anything can happen at anytime. But the fact that I am offering this service against all of these odds, sometimes challenges the warring groups to think about what it is that they are being offered.

Assefa describes putting himself at considerable risk in order to reach the military outpost of a commander who he wanted to enlist in a mediation process. At first, the commander laughed and asked:

“What are you doing here?” But he knew that it had been a tremendous effort for us, who were so vulnerable, to come and talk with him to find some kind of alternative to the war. And it did not take very long before we connected as human beings, and talked. In fact I felt like a deep human communication was established — not because of the exercise of power or reward or punishment, but because of our vulnerability.

In Annette Baier’s view, trust is not always a good thing. Thinking from the perspective of a suppressed group, she argues that it is unwise to trust someone who is intent on maintaining
power at our expense. Hizkias Assefa, by contrast, views trust through the lens of someone intent on transforming the dynamics of oppression or violence. With this purpose, it can be important to extend trust (or to make oneself vulnerable as if trust were warranted) because of what our trust and our vulnerability can evoke in someone who appears unable or unwilling to trust.

This insight about the relationship of trust and vulnerability can help us think in a more complex way about Sanath’s question about when (and how) to raise issues that might damage a tenuous trust. The decision to refrain from speaking one’s mind might — especially over time — be experienced by a counterpart as a decision to remain invulnerable, reflecting a lack of willingness to risk. If that is the case, it could contribute to a cycle of restraint and self-protectiveness, exactly the opposite of the trusting relationship we hoped in the first place to nourish. The key might be to find ways to raise potentially damaging issues where we make ourselves vulnerable, trusting the other to refrain from harming us (by withdrawing from the relationship for instance) even when it would be fully in their power to do so.

Do these reflections on the concept of ‘trust,’ including its relation to ‘vulnerability,’ offer any other insights into Sanath’s question about whether and how to raise difficult issues in relationships where trust is fragile?
Exercising Assumptions: What Kind of Relationships
Are We Seeking to Build?

We have come quite a distance in our journey exploring whether and when it is appropriate to refrain from speaking. We have first identified the ethical question or dilemma and then considered moral possibilities and risks associated with refraining from speaking, especially in light of the dynamics of power that influence the relationship in question. We have also explored different understandings of the concept of ‘trust,’ and how capacities for trust can be both impaired and restored. We are almost ready to decide how we might respond to Sanath’s dilemma.

First, though, we will pause to reflect briefly on our expectations about communication in different kinds of relationships. These expectations differ from one culture to another, so it is important that you think through the answers to the questions on the worksheet on the following page. To what extent do we expect our close friends to reveal their thoughts and feelings to us? To what extent do we expect self-disclosure from colleagues? When we build relationships with people from an adversary community — are these relationships more like friendships or collegial relations?
Communication in Different Kinds Of Relationships

1. Think of a close friend or family member. What expectations do you have of your communication with each other? Do you expect each other to be completely open about thought and feelings — even when you disagree? Are there limits to how much you can expect to hear, what you are allowed to express, and what you are required to say?

2. Think of a colleague at work. What expectations do you have of your communication with each other? Do you expect each other to be completely open about thoughts and feelings — even when you disagree? Are there limits to how much you can expect to hear, what you are allowed to express, and what you are required to say?
3. Think of someone with whom you are in dialogue, or someone from an adversary community with whom you have developed a relationship. What expectations do you have of your communication with each other? Do you expect each other to be completely open about thoughts and feelings — even when you disagree? Are there limits to how much you can expect (or want) to hear and to what you are responsible (or allowed) to say?
Communicative Contexts and Virtues

The American feminist writer Adrienne Rich argues eloquently for the value of honest forthright communication in our closest relationships. In such relationships, she writes that silence, or refraining from speech, is the equivalent of lying.

*Truth is not one thing, or even a system. It is an increasing complexity... This is why the effort to speak honestly is so important... An honorable human relationship — that is, one in which two people have the right to use the word love — is a process, delicate, violent, often terrifying to both persons involved, a process of refining the truths they tell each other... It isn’t that to have an honorable relationship with you, I have to understand everything, or tell you everything at once, or that I can know, beforehand, everything I need to tell you.

It means that most of the time I am eager, longing for the possibility of telling you. That these possibilities may seem frightening, but not destructive, to me. That I feel strong enough to hear your tentative and groping words. That we both know we are trying, all the time, to extend the possibilities of truth between us.

The possibility of life between us.

By contrast, think of the many professional roles in which we are expected to refrain from speaking — at least about some topics and to some persons. Teachers often refrain from expressing their own opinion, so that students have the space to develop their own perspectives and ideas. Lawyers are required to speak openly to their clients, but then to maintain confidentiality outside of that relationship. Therapists might refrain from articulating their responses in order to allow the client’s interpretation to flourish, and to avoid projecting their own feelings onto the client’s experience.

Peacebuilding is both similar and different from these other professions. It is work that engages us very profoundly with other people. Transforming a conflict system requires us to engage with people intellectually, politically, emotionally and spiritually. It is work that requires us to be present with our whole beings. Nevertheless, the work of peacebuilding often requires extreme discretion in relation to what we express, how we express it, and to whom.

In deciding when to raise difficult issues it is important to consider the nature of the relationship we are in and the nature of the relationship that we seek to build. Is it a friendship? Is it a professional relationship? Is it a combination of both? Do we and our counterparts think of the relationship in the same way? What kind of forthrightness do others have reason to expect from us — given both the cultural context and the (various) understandings of the relationship itself?

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The Nature of Peacebuilding Relationships and Expectations for Communication

- As a peacebuilder working within your own region, how would you describe the relationships you seek to build with members of the adversary community?

- Does identifying the nature of these relationships help to address Sanath’s dilemma about when to speak his own mind and when to refrain from speaking?
The relationships that we, as peacebuilders, construct with counterparts from adversary communities will rarely be simply friendships. Sometimes they require more commitment and work — and they therefore grow to be even more intimate and meaningful — than ordinary friendships. Other times, however, relationships built in the context of peacemaking are perhaps less intimate than our other friendships. These relationships are partly instrumental, in that we engage in them not only for the joy of friendship but also for other purposes, such as creating a channel for communication between our communities or exploring the possibilities and limits of cross-community understanding. In such cases, we may not be comfortable sharing ourselves with this counterpart as deeply or as openly as we would with someone with whom friendship itself was the sole intention of the relationship. It is important to be aware of our own and our counterpart’s expectations of the relationship as it develops.

The philosophers Nicholas Burbules and Suzanne Rice describe a range of “communicative virtues” they believe help to make dialogue across differences possible.

...The structure of dialogue across differences also depends on what we have called “communicative virtues” that help make dialogue possible and help sustain the dialogical relation over time. These virtues include: tolerance, patience, respect for differences, a willingness to listen, the inclination to admit that one may be mistaken, the ability to reinterpret or translate one’s own concerns in a way that makes them comprehensible to others, the self-imposition of restraint in order that others may “have a turn” to speak, and the disposition to express one’s self honestly and sincerely. The possession of these virtues influences one’s capacities both to express one’s own belief, values and feelings accurately, and to listen to and hear those of others.

Virtues require close attention to the particulars of the communicative situation at hand, and how any of them are expressed will vary according to what these situations require. Listening, for example, although generally regarded as a virtue in situations where one’s partner is struggling with ideas that he or she wants to articulate, might not be so regarded in situations where urgently needed directions or information are asked for, or where silence signals acquiescence to views one does not actually hold. Tolerance and patience may be virtues when practiced by a teacher striving to understand and appreciate a student’s perspective, but not so when invoked to protect racist or sexist speech that intimidates, harms or silences others. Hence, these communicative qualities are best thought of as virtues or dispositions rather than rules, precisely because they need to be interpreted and applied thoughtfully to different situations.

Choosing the appropriate virtue for the particular moment in a particular relationship is key.
Cultivating Trust

Raising sensitive issues in a relationship of tenuous trust creates a dilemma. On the one hand, we do not want to jeopardize the entire relationship. On the other hand, a real dialogue — the kind of dialogue required to enhance reciprocal understanding and to explore ways to resolve or transform the conflict — requires considerable openness from all parties about their thoughts, feelings and opinions.

How do we cultivate sufficient trust so that a relationship is strong enough for difficult issues to be addressed? Hikias Assefa, above, shows how we can allow our own vulnerability to call forth trustworthiness in someone we don’t know — or even someone who might warrant our caution or wariness. In the section that follows, three peacebuilders — including Sanath — tell stories about the cultivation of trust in relationships across adversary lines.

Before you read their stories, take a few moments to use the worksheet on the following page to record your own experiences and ideas about strategies for allowing trust to develop in relationships across adversary lines.

Let Them Come and See Our Reality

The first story is told by Reem, a Palestinian advocate for women’s rights, who was for many years a participant in Israeli-Palestinian dialogue.

In 1987, before the intifada, an Italian group organized a Friendship Conference in Jerusalem with Israeli and Palestinian women. All Palestinian women boycotted the conference, except for a few other women and me. We heard Israeli women talk, and I decided that we had to voice our issues and talk to them. I realized that there is no other solution. They mistrust us and we mistrust them. I started to go to house meetings and town meetings to meet with Israelis. I worked to accept people as they are.

We started this process, and then, all of a sudden, I couldn’t go to any of these meetings. I realized that they didn’t know anything, especially the women from the Tel Aviv area. I said, “Let them come and see our reality.” They started to come and meet with families and people in the refugee camps, and then the ethical dilemma started on the Israeli side. Then we developed a Negotiation about Dialogue, and at one meeting we were attacked together by Israeli soldiers. Some of the Israeli women were
arrested, wounded, suffering from tear gas.

So I started to see things from a different point of view. I see an Israeli child and see that it is not his fault that he was born into this country. I started to think in a different way: I am a human being, they are human beings, but we are not on the same level. But without each other, we can’t have peace or justice.

This was one of my new political struggles. But it is not easy. There are external elements; it is not just how we feel about it. Every time there is a major event, we all return to our old feelings.

A FRIEND WHO ALMOST DID NOT BECOME A FRIEND

The next story was told by Rachel, a black South African activist:

I have a friend who almost didn’t become a friend because early in our relationship she said she didn’t think of me as black. I challenged her and she really tried to think about it and understand why that would be insulting to me. We worked through it. That story for me illustrates something about establishing relationships across power differences. Often people in the powerful position have a sense that if you want to have a good relationship with the oppressed, then it’s an affirmation to say you don’t see in them the reason for their oppression. Being black is one of the reasons I’ve been oppressed, but that’s not all that being black means to me. And I think that initially she thought that it had been an oppressive experience to be perceived as black. It takes time to become aware of people’s self-perception – and because of being in a privileged position, you have learned the dominant worldview. And to say “You’re just a person” – I don’t want to be “just a person.” My blackness is part of the core of who I am. I don’t want you to see me removed from that. It’s like saying “I don’t see you as a woman.” I am a woman. Being a woman has affected my reality and if you don’t see that, then there is a big part of me you’re not seeing.

AN EXAMPLE OF A SINHALESE PERSON WHO IS A GENUINE PERSON

Just how much can ride on early relationships made across enemy lines is apparent in this next excerpt from Sanath’s story, in which his Tamil counterpart is looking for evidence that any Sinhalese people might be “genuine”.

Murali had a very close friend who was renting a house from a landlord, and [when he had to leave his wife’s relatives’ house] Murali thought he could go there. But the landlord didn’t want Murali to come. Maybe he had heard too many stories about Tamils coming to rent – first two come,
and then ten will come into the same small room. And maybe he didn’t want to see all these young Tamil men, who in his eyes could be terrorists. Murali’s friend had rented an independent section of the house, but you had to walk through the landlord’s entrance and the landlord said he couldn’t come.

So Murali and the friend argued with the landlord, but there was a language problem since the landlord didn’t speak good English and didn’t speak Tamil, and Murali and his friend can’t speak Sinhalese and also don’t speak good English. Murali’s friend asserted his right to invite whoever he wanted into the house. He said he was paying for the room, and there was room, so he must come and stay with me. So then the landlord told the police that a suspicious person had come to his house.

So the police immediately came there, and took away the friend. Murali wasn’t there; he had gone to the embassy to get his visa for the United States. But a message was left that Murali also had to report to the police station.

So Murali gave a call to me, because he had to meet me to give me the visa and to get his tickets. He informed me that a problem had arisen. I told him that it’s important that I get your passport, to leave it with another person in that area. So I actually went to collect the passport, and he had gone to the police station. And on the way back home, I was passing the police station, so I thought I’d better drop in.

Now I was a bit concerned about dropping in to the police station, because I am not the type of person who goes to police stations and knows my way around police stations or how to deal with these people. Also, I was concerned that if I went, it would be important not to make it a big deal, because if the local police officer decides Murali is going to be difficult, he can keep him. So sometimes it might be better to let Murali sort this out himself. But since I was passing anyway, I felt maybe I should announce my link with him and also that he is going with me to America.

I discovered how horrible it is to go to see the police. I asked the policeman, “One of my friends is here and I want to know what has happened. What is the problem?” So he asked how I knew Murali was here. I said that he called me and told me he was asked to come here. So

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Exploring Trust

Do you think that each of the three stories related in this section portray the development of a tenuous trust?

- If so, what allowed for trust to develop in each case?

- How would you characterize each party’s trust and trustworthiness in each story?

- Having reflected upon these three stories told by peacebuilding practitioners from different regions, can you now think of any new approaches to cultivating a tenuous trust? Are there some approaches you would not choose to take?
the police officer asked, "What time did he call you? I said about twelve o'clock. "That can't be true. That's a lie - because he was only given the message at one o'clock." Then I remembered, yes, he had only called at two o'clock.

Already I had become a liar. And they were intimidating me. "Who are you? Why are you coming here?" So I was getting worried about what was going to happen to me. I knew they weren't going to take me into custody, but I was worried that I was endangering Murali and the poor fellow would get into worse trouble.

Fortunately, a more senior policeman came and when I told who I was he told me to come back in three hours because he had to question Murali. Before I left, though, he took me to see Murali and I could see that he was OK. So I went off and came back in three hours and they wanted someone to guarantee Murali, which I couldn't do because I barely knew him. But I had a person who is funding Murali's activities, a Tamil lady involved with an international NGO, so I contacted her and the two of us gave a statement and took him out. In the meantime Murali had been given a few slaps by that police officer who trapped me.

Now I have heard these things, and normally the police would even ask for money: five thousand rupees, ten thousand rupees. And these people [in custody] are so frightened and desperate they just want to get out, so they pay up. And if they don't the police have the power to take you to the magistrate and get an order to put you into the remand prison for two weeks, and then it can get lengthened on and on. So it is very important to settle it at the police station itself; if it gets into the legal process you are trapped. It could become a fundamental rights case and go to the Supreme Court and that takes time, and you are languishing in prison, so you can't antagonize them because they have the power.

I don't know what would have happened if I hadn't come. Maybe he would have gotten out anyway, because he actually was innocent. He is a university lecturer, with some status. Maybe he would have been kept there for a day.

For me it was not an easy choice to go to the police station. Luckily I was actually just passing by, because if the station had been far away, other arguments might have come forward. I was thinking that if I intervene, maybe matters would get worse.

But for Murali that was an important event, and my girlfriend also came there and now he uses her as an example of a Sinhalese person who is a genuine person. He tells his colleagues in the Northeast that she came to the police station to get him out.
The Question of Integrity

When making a decision about when to speak and when to refrain from speaking, it is important to be aware of the nature of the relationship we are building, the imperatives of trust building, and the expectations of us that our conversation partners are likely to hold. These are the concepts and issues we have been addressing in this chapter so far. It is also important, however, to consider the effects of our decisions to speak and to refrain from speaking on our own well being. In this section, we explore that issue in terms of our capacity to maintain the sense of our own integrity.

After a period of listening attentively, with an eagerness to understand, and while refraining from sharing his own, contradictory views, Sanath discovered that he had become confused about his own sense of right and wrong. Feeling confused about what is right and wrong can be quite a familiar feeling for peacebuilders. As we listen empathetically to people on opposing sides of a conflict, we begin to see the internal logic to two very different points of view. If we come from one of the communities in question the sense of uncertainty can be disorienting indeed.

To some degree, if we did not find ourselves confused at times we probably would not be doing a good enough job of listening. We are required to extend ourselves, to imagine different points of view, to empathize with the suffering of people on all sides. Changes in deeply rooted configurations of beliefs and feelings can be experienced as a kind of shattering, and this experience can be especially challenging for peacebuilders who are insiders to a conflict. Until the pieces of one’s being are reconfigured into a new pattern, uncertainties of various sorts will abound.

Nevertheless, if feelings of confusion are prolonged or deeply felt, they certainly represent a challenge to our ability to be effective and to act with the kind of assuredness that inspires trust. If we have no inner compass or touchstone, no reliable sense to guide the myriad decisions we are called on to make on an on-going basis, we will lose our ability to be trustworthy — to ourselves as well as to others.

In your work as a peacebuilder — either in relation to a conflict in your own region or elsewhere — have you ever listened so intently to different voices that you became confused about your own sense of what was ethically acceptable?

- How did you work your way out of your confusion?
- In retrospect, would you have done anything differently?

Ethical Confusion

Reviewing Conceptions of Integrity

In understanding the implications of the loss of one’s own ethical sense, it will be helpful to return to the concept of ‘integrity’ as it was discussed in the introductory unit. Becoming temporarily confused seems quite likely — if not inevitable — when we are involved in processes of conflict transformation. How can we maintain a sense of integrity through a process such as this?
We might not be able to maintain a sense of integrity — especially if we understand integrity as it has been traditionally understood, to refer to whole-heartedness, or consistency to a set of unconditional commitments over time. But there are other conceptions of integrity that might provide some guidance in this situation. (These are explored at greater length in the Introductory Unit to the guidebook.)

Victoria Davion, we remember, proposes a conception of integrity that is based on the capacity to monitor one’s own process of change. We can ensure that no important parts of ourselves get inadvertently left behind — although we might choose to let go of some belief or value. We can work to see that no commitments to a particular “world” require us to negate some other aspect of our identity or some other core commitment. Elements of our disparate identities might conflict — but, according to Davion, to have integrity a person must be committed to maintaining a connection among them, allowing each part of himself to critique the other.

In Sanath’s case, it sounds like this is precisely what he was doing as he told this story. As he experimented with taking on his Tamil counterpart’s beliefs about the killing of the mayors he discovered not only that other members of his community were disapproving but, we can imagine, that some aspect of his own belief structure was violated as well. Bringing this tension to awareness is the first step in making a choice. It may be that he needs to live with and within this tension for some period of time in order to decide how to accommodate or resolve it. But by engaging some part of himself as a witness to the transformation and the tension, and allowing different parts of himself to critique the others, he was exhibiting what Davion, at least, takes for ‘integrity.’

Cheshire Calhoun, by contrast, argues that integrity is not only a personal virtue (i.e. a quality that helps define the boundary between one’s self and what is outside of one’s self) but also a social virtue (i.e. a quality that is important because it affects our relations with others). She conceptualizes integrity as ‘standing for something,’ being willing to take a stand based on one’s own best judgment. At the same time, we must recognize that even our best judgment reflects our own “deliberative point of view.”

How can we come up with the best possible answers to ethical questions? It involves understanding ourselves as members of communities of “co-deliberators,” people who, like us, are also seeking to ascertain the best course of action, the most ethical decision, or the best balance between care for self and others. By taking each person’s point of view seriously, by bringing differing perspectives to bear on each other, communities of inquirers can make better judgments than any person could on his or her own. According to Calhoun, we have a responsibility to take seriously our own opinions, to make judgments knowing that they matter, not only for the sake of our own integrity, but because the communities of which we are a part need us to have the courage of our convictions. If we don’t, everyone will be deprived of our best thinking.

But if integrity is the virtue of having a proper regard for one’s own judgment as a deliberator among deliberators, it would seem that integrity is not just a matter of sticking to one’s guns. Arrogance, pomposity, bullying, haranguing, defensiveness, incivility, close-mindedness, deafness to criticism...all seem incompatible with integrity. All reflect a basic unwillingness or inability to acknowledge the singularity of one’s own
best judgment and to accept the burden of standing for it in the face of conflict. Moreover, acknowledging others as deliberators who must themselves abide by their best judgment seems part of, not exterior to, acting with integrity.... Integrity calls us simultaneously to stand behind our convictions and to take seriously others’ doubts about them.

In Calhoun’s view, then it is entirely possible to be a person of integrity and to be ambivalent or to compromise. She would argue, however, for the importance of Sanath speaking his mind. He should do this, she would argue, not for the sake of protecting his own sense of right and wrong, although this might be one outcome of that action. He should look for appropriate opportunities to express his opinions so that his entire community — including his Tamil counterparts — can enjoy the benefit of his best thinking.

Would Calhoun’s notion that integrity requires us to have a proper regard for our own judgement as a “deliberator among deliberators” influence your own decision about when to speak and when to refrain from speaking?
Making Choices in the Face of the Dilemma

The purpose of this entire discussion has not been to judge Sanath’s decision nor to give him advice in retrospect. It is rather to use his candid reflections to help us anticipate a situation in which we might find ourselves sometime in the future. Suppose, like him, we find ourselves working to build a delicate relationship with someone from an adversary community. Suppose she espouses views with which we disagree — perhaps about the use of violence, or the nature of a political agreement. We listen to her views, for all of the reasons we believe listening is important: it communicates respect, it allows us to understand, it might provide a space for deeper reflection and possibly shifts in the views of the one who is speaking. But, in the end, if we feel ourselves becoming confused, or refraining from speech to the point that we worry about being dishonest, we wonder if there might not be other possible courses of actions.

Are there some courses of action in a situation such as this that we would deem better than others? How would we decide?

One approach to imagining “live ethical alternatives” would be to return to the list of ethical possibilities and risks we developed earlier in the chapter. Use the worksheet on the next two pages to think through what we have considered about power, trust and the nature of a peacebuilding relationship. What is right about refraining from speaking? What is right about speaking one’s mind? Are there approaches that integrate the values that inform both courses of action?
Integrating Values

Look over the list of ethical possibilities and risks we have developed in relation to Sanath’s dilemma.

1. What is right about a decision to refrain from speaking our own opinions in a relationship of tenuous trust? What values would be exemplified in such a choice?

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2. What would be right about a decision to speak one’s mind? What values would be exemplified in such a choice?

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3. Can you think of “live ethical alternatives” — possible courses of action that minimize the risks, make the most of possibilities, and/or integrate the values embedded in both choices?
One Possible Choice

Are there courses of action that would handle a fragile trust with the delicateness it requires but still enact the kind of respect that we associate with listening and with the forthright and honest expression of our views? Can we find a solution that integrates concerns about our own clarity and respect for the other with the nurturing of a fragile relationship and delicate trust? Can we draw on insights about trust and vulnerability as well as a more nuanced understanding of the possibilities of and constraints on relationships across differences in power and across lines of enmity?

One possibility — that might or might not be feasible depending upon the context and the personalities involved — would be to engage our counterparts in conversations about the relationship itself. We might make ourselves vulnerable by acknowledging the significance of the relationship, and our concern that discussing sensitive issues would jeopardize the trust we are building. Together we and our counterparts could discuss:

- What does it mean to us, and to our communities, for us to work towards a trusting relationship?
- In what ways will this be similar to an ordinary friendship? In what ways is it different?
- What is that we want to trust each other to do: to listen respectfully? to speak honestly? to agree? to wish each other no harm?
- Between us, how shall we handle disagreement about important issues?
- What are the fears that each person brings to the relationship, based on the history of the conflict?
- What kinds of reassurances can people offer each other in relation to their fears?

This approach may not be feasible or desirable in many situations. But for several reasons it holds some promise. It integrates concern for the fragility of the relationship with a desire to respect our counterpart by being forthright and direct.

Meta-level conversation (i.e. conversation about the conversation) allows both partners to explore and determine the kind of relationship they are building. It brings an element of equity into the relationship not by reducing the amount of communication, but rather by increasing it. In most situations where disparities in power define relationships between communities, it is not possible to eliminate asymmetries within cross-community relationships. But it is possible to address power imbalances directly and to have equal participation in decisions about how to work within and around them.

Also, the approach of engaging in conversation about the relationship allows for openness about the conditions under which both parties are seeking to trust and to be trustworthy. This openness may lay a stronger foundation for a future trust than can be accomplished through tentative, issue-by-issue risk-taking.

What other ideas can we imagine now, with the support of friends and colleagues, with the luxury of safety and time to reflect?
Notes


The quotation from Annette Baier can be found in Moral Prejudices: Essays on Ethics, published by Harvard University Press in 1994. The particular citation can be found on page 133.

The comments by Olsson and Rita Fields can be found in "The Terrorist and the Terrorized: Some Psychoanalytic Considerations", in The Psychodynamics of International Relationships: Volume I concepts and theories.by Olsson. Published in 1990, the volume was edited by V. Volkan, D. Julius & J. Montville. Lexington, MA and Toronto: Lexington Books, D.C.Heath and Company. Fields' comments can be found on page 190; Olsson’s on page 189.


H.J.N. Horsburg’s comments on therapeutic trust are quoted in Govier’s book on page 18. They are taken from his work "The Ethics of Trust," in Philosophical Quarterly 10 (1960): 343-354.

Hizkias Assefa’s comments on vulnerability were made during a lecture at Brandeis University in the November 1999.


A note to readers:
This resource listing will be updated regularly on the website of The International Center for Ethics, Justice and Public Life http://www.brandeis.edu/ethics. We welcome suggestions from discussion leaders and users of the guidebook.

Philosophical Texts

(See Notes at end of chapter for texts on 'trust' and 'integrity.')

Peacebuilding, Coexistence and Conflict Resolution Texts


Websites


• INCORE was founded in 1993 in a joint initiative between the University of Ulster and the United Nations University. Its website includes information on ethnic conflict by region and country as well as the text of peace agreements: http://www.incore.ulst.ac.uk.


• TamilNet, a website dedicated to reporting on Tamil affairs to the world: http://www.TamilNet.com.

• “Rice and Honey: Children’s Art From Sri Lanka,” an exhibition organized by Dr. Jerry Ehrlich, is presented online through the University of Iowa Hospitals and Clinics Medical Museum: http://www.uihealthcare.com/depts/medmuseum/riceandhoney/riceandhoney.html.
Videos and Documentaries


Educators and discussion leaders are encouraged to adapt the material included in the chapter, the resource list and the additional readings to suit the interests, needs and capacities of their students.

If participants or students were unfamiliar with the Sri Lankan conflict, it might be useful to screen *Rice and Honey Documentary Video*, which is one of the few video documentaries on this particular conflict. There are, however, excellent websites that cover different aspects of the conflict and the history, culture, politics and economy of the region.

Please note that the worksheets within the chapter include steps that are necessary to the inquiry that is the focus of the chapter. The questions in boxes are important but optional. They are engaging and reflective, designed to help students think through their own opinions and experiences prior to reading about the opinions and experiences of others.

Workshops can be structured around a subset of the questions, readings and worksheets included in the chapter. Each set of questions and each worksheet can become the basis for a whole class discussion, small group discussions or exercises. Workshop participants can explore their own experiences and feelings through individual writing and/or sharing in dyads or small groups.

It is helpful to read the stories aloud, especially when working with groups where English is not the first language and where educational levels are mixed. It is possible to assign small groups different texts — for instance when discussing different peacebuilders experiences with cultivating trust. Each of these stories begins on a fresh page, so multiple copies can be produced for workshop participants.

The additional reading that follows this section reveals a dilemma that is in some senses similar to the dilemma addressed in the body of the chapter. In it, a peacebuilder wonders about his decision to refrain from speaking honestly to his own parents, primarily out of a desire to protect them from worrying about him.

The two videos listed in the resource section — one emerging from coexistence efforts in the Middle East, and one from reconciliation efforts in South Africa — could become the basis for further explorations of trust-building and honest communication. To what extent does each present examples of deepening trust? How is this trust achieved? In what ways do the adversaries featured in the documentaries speak their minds and refrain from speaking?

Participants in workshops or in college undergraduate or graduate courses could be assigned to engage in a parallel inquiry about an ethical question of their choice as they work through the steps to this inquiry outlined in this chapter.
Isolated in My Own Family

From Ivan, an anti-war activist and psychologist from Belgrade, Serbia:

I come from a very harmonious family. I have two sisters: one is my twin and the other is older. My parents have had a difficult life, but they managed to provide for us and give us an education.

My parents’ origins were in poverty and struggle, but we children had a comfortable, middle-class life growing up. My father was young when the Second World War broke out and he spent the whole war fighting. After the war, my parents moved to Belgrade and built their lives “from scratch” with no support. My father became a lawyer and my mother is a kindergarten teacher. They’ve been together forty-seven years and they love each other very much. We have a very close and loving family, and I respect my parents very much.

When the war broke out in ’92 my family was in total denial. Everyone believed the official media. I knew we were being fed lies because I had been talking with many different people. When I began to do peace work, my parents thought I was taking too much of a risk. They wanted me to be silent. I didn’t tell them much because I didn’t want them to have unfounded fears. I have become accustomed to living as the black sheep, that they wouldn’t understand me.

There were demonstrations in Belgrade last year and my mother said “You’re not going to that, are you?” and I said “No.” But of course then I was on the front line of the demonstration! I don’t know if it is right, but I didn’t want them to worry, and I know that I need to make my own decisions. But if I don’t speak to them sincerely, I become more and more isolated in my own family. It is a dilemma for me.