

***FORGIVENESS  
AND  
RECONCILIATION***

*Religion, Public Policy & Conflict Transformation*

*Edited by*

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TEMPLETON FOUNDATION PRESS PHILADELPHIA & LONDON

**CHAPTER 14**

**Implementation of Track Two Diplomacy**

***Developing a Model of Forgiveness***

Olga Botcharova

LIMITING CHARACTERISTICS  
OFFICIAL DIPLOMACY

OF

IF WE WANT TO BE MORE EFFICIENT in dealing with contemporary conflicts, it is time to recognize that the human tragedies caused by ethnic conflicts are to a significant extent the result of the international community's failure to provide political leadership that has clear vision, moral conviction, and political will. The Balkan conflict, particularly the events in Kosovo, is a clear example of such an approach. For over a dozen years numerous practitioners and experts in conflict resolution had been predicting dangerous developments in the then-existing situation in Kosovo, but the global policymakers chose first to ignore the warnings, then to close their eyes on the ethnic cleansing, and, finally, to intervene with expensive and inefficient military attacks. This "peacemaking" scenario is all too familiar, as is its outcome—a conflict unresolved.

Even when accords have been undertaken, the sad statistics are confirmed, that more than 50 percent of international initiatives and negotiations on peace fail. Why do these failures occur with frightening persistence, despite the fact that they are developed by informed experts who often offer seemingly balanced and quite rational solutions to the most complicated problems of partitioning territories and people? What is wrong with such initiatives? We may find some answers in the analyses of the nature of

contemporary conflict presented from the perspective of track two diplomacy, found in the works of John Paul Lederach, Joseph Montville, Douglas Johnston and Cynthia Sampson, Donald Shriver, and others.<sup>1</sup> The essence of these studies and my experience in peacemaking in regions of severe conflict suggest that three major factors block the successful implementation of international peace policy: (1) a failure to attend to the deep need for healing from victimization of the parties in violent conflict, (2) strategies that impose foreign recipes for peace, and (3) strategies that appeal to the political hierarchy as the exclusive decision-makers. Let's look at each of these factors in turn.

### **Failure to Attend to the Need for Healing**

An inherent weakness of many official initiatives is that they are rational responses to irrational phenomena. The contemporary ethnic conflict is not rational. Warfare is directed at churches and mosques, hospitals and cemeteries, cultural and historical monuments; women, children, and old people become the planned targets of atrocities. The tools of official diplomacy and military solutions are not adequate for handling such conflicts. Who is the enemy of well-equipped, highly trained American NATO soldiers and Russian UFOR boys who are sent to the region ready for modern combat? Typically, their "combat field" is a street in a small town or village, and the "enemy" is a crowd of angry men and women, former neighbors shouting at each other, cursing each other, ready to stone or shoot each other. It may be a young widow who lost her children under the ruins of her family home and who turned herself into a sniper. It may be a Palestinian child who witnessed how his brother bled to death, shot by an Israeli soldier, a boy who then grabbed a stone and became a "freedom fighter." Drawn into the war by the

1. John Paul Lederach, *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Institute of Peace Press, 1997); Joseph Montville, *The Arrow and the Olive Branch: A Case for Track Two Diplomacy. The Psychodynamics of International Relationships* (Lexington, Mass.: Lexington Books, 1990), and *The Healing function in Political Conflict Resolution: Conflict Resolution Theory and Practice* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993); Douglas Johnston and Cynthia Sampson, eds., *Religion: The Missing Dimension of Statecraft* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); and Donald W. Shriver, *An Ethic for Enemies: Forgiveness in Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

manipulations of ambitious nationalists, the people are unable to break the cycle of revenge. Considering the extent of suffering and the losses they have experienced, it should not be surprising. How is it possible to ignore pain and forget the hurts committed against one's family or ethnic group? Even though one may realize that partnership in a solution (the idea vigorously promoted by outsiders and often perceived as insulting by deeply victimized groups and individuals) is the only way to stop further tragedies, one may still not be able to disconnect from one's emotions and to betray those principles and values fundamental to life itself. People forced by their leaders to fight with each other only yesterday cannot readily shake hands today just because their leaders finally draw lines on maps and put their signatures on important papers prepared in America, Paris, or Geneva. Alas! Only a paper peace can be reached on paper. Appeals to develop partnership and cooperation based on a policy of "carrots and sticks" do not deal with the wounds, feelings, and deeply rooted perceptions of the victimized sides. This is the reason that we see little change in behavior even after peace agreements are imposed. It is next to impossible for victims to look to their enemy or abuser as a partner in search of a solution to conflict unless they undergo dramatic and painful inner changes. This transformation is possible only after the individual's, and group's, sense of victimhood is understood, respected, and properly addressed—hardly a task for foreign boys with guns in military uniforms. Although international troops can successfully suppress military activities and introduce a ceasefire—and these are undeniably necessary conditions to begin any work on true peace—they are not able, not prepared, not equipped, and not trained to deal with matters of healing trauma, addressing existing stereotypes, and other challenges that must be met if we hope to achieve sustainable peace and future reconciliation.

Official diplomacy (known as track one in conflict-resolution terminology) is oriented to a "carrot and stick" policy and to the short-term results achieved through military pressure. It does not take into consideration the nature of conflict, where perceptual, social-psychological, and spiritual dimensions are core, rather than peripheral, concerns. As Lederach observes,

The immediacy of hatred and prejudice, of racism and xenophobia, as primary factors and motivators of the conflict require approaches

to its transformation that are rooted in social-psychological and spiritual dimensions that traditionally have been seen as either irrelevant to or outside the competency of international diplomacy.<sup>1</sup> •

### Strategies Imposing Foreign Recipes for Peace

The second critical factor that blocks progress in international efforts is that the international community often sees people in the regions of conflict as passive recipients, rather than active resources, in peace building, although it is these people who are an instrumental and integral element to sustainable change. "We in the international community have too easily approached these settings as if they were devoid of resources for peacemaking." Bosnia in particular, with its multinational, pluralistic traditions, provides us with numerous examples of how its people are able to successfully implement those resources. Crimea, a small peninsula at the Black Sea that Ukraine received after difficult negotiations with Russia, is another example of the tremendous efforts of dozens of local communities struggling, thus far successfully, to resist tremendous tension and massive ethnic violence. The desired changes will be sustainable only if the indigenous people develop a sense of ownership over the peace initiatives. When we the outsiders leave, the local people will stay and will have to implement those changes and live with them. Besides, only they have enough "here and now" knowledge and experience to address the true reasons for the conflict. Therefore, from the very beginning, everything that outsiders attempt to do in the region should be done in conjunction with the people living there. Eliciting ideas, cherishing the seeds of grassroots reconciliation, and providing all necessary support for their implementation involves a slow and delicate process that requires great trust, network development, and long-term commitment. This approach is based on faith, discipline, and patience. It does not provide quick sensational results and cannot be measured with the traditional tools designed to evaluate a "fix the problem" approach. Instead, following the concept of sustainable transformation, we move away from approaching a given setting with a single set of tools for peacemaking

z. John Paul Lederach, "Pacifism in Contemporary Conflict: A Christian Perspective," paper commissioned by the U.S. Institute of Peace, 1993, p. ii

and place emphasis on discovering and empowering resources, modalities and mechanisms that emerge naturally from the setting of the conflict.<sup>3</sup> Only with these conditions do the peace initiatives become an essential part of the people's lives. Then we may hope that the first fragile efforts will be rooted into people's hearts and minds and will lead to powerful changes grown from inside, thus building a long-term commitment to peacemaking.

### Strategies Appealing Exclusively to the Political Hierarchy

The third factor preventing the successful implementation of global initiatives is related to the second. It is connected with existing diplomatic biases, which, as Lederach notes, deal primarily with hierarchies of political and military structures, short-term results, especially in terms of ceasefires, and media attention given to eminent figures.<sup>4</sup> Political leaders have a very limited ability to work patiently on subtle issues of nonviolent conflict resolution, even if they may choose to do so. They are seen, above all, as the stewards of people's defense and strength.<sup>5</sup> Although peacemaking is seen as trickling down from the top to other levels of the population, sustainable transformation of conflict calls for more than that. It goes beyond traditional concepts of ceasefire, and beyond top-level negotiations and highly visible efforts, toward the most delicate, challenging, and painful issues of relational transformation—through reconciliation among common people. When a critical mass of medium-level and top grassroots enthusiasts manages to heal its traumas, process its sense of victimhood, and come to forgiveness, there will be hope that the war mentality in the society will gradually be changed. These respected people, who possess great initiative, are in the best position both to promote a new shift in grassroots perceptions and to influence the attitudes of top-level decision-makers. Without a safe, supportive environment, there is a little hope that political leaders will risk changing the positions with which they are strongly identified. Sustainable peace is more about relationships than about reconstruction work and suppressing gunfire, thus it is possible only through the trans-

3. *Ibid*

4. Lederach, Building Peace.

5. Montville, Arrow and the Olive Branch.

formation of people and relationships from below. The transformed people would then be able to change their relationships and build adequate new structures to support them, including changing the leaders if required. For the necessary infrastructure to be in place, the processes and solutions for a lasting peace must provide space for input and implementation across all levels of the affected society.

## THE ROLE OF TRACK TWO DIPLOMACY: FILLING THE VOID

Consistent with the shortcomings described above, official diplomacy has generally failed to consider social-psychological and spiritual approaches in peace building. Track two diplomacy has emerged to fill this void. Montville describes track two diplomacy as an unofficial interaction between members of adversarial groups or nations to develop strategies, influence public opinion, and organize human and material resources in ways that might help resolve their conflict. He notes that track two diplomacy is in no way a substitute for official, formal track one government-to-government or leader-to-leader relationships. Rather, it is designed to assist official leaders by compensating for the constraints imposed upon them by the understandable need for leaders to be strong in the face of the enemy. He observes further that track two diplomacy seeks political formulas or scenarios that might satisfy the basic security and esteem needs of the parties to a particular dispute. "On a more general level, it seeks to promote ; an environment in a political community, through the education of public ;,i opinion, that would make it safer for political leaders to take risks for .\* peace."<sup>6</sup> Promoted by political psychology track two concepts are being recognized increasingly by some decision-makers in politics. The civil peace accords mentioned in the Dayton agreement are a recent example of this. In practice, however, track two has not yet been supported as a vital and strategic component of peacemaking, and its cost effectiveness has not yet been evaluated and fully realized. The failure of the international community

6. *Ibid.*, 163.

to implement the aforementioned Dayton Accords might serve as an example of this. Specific activities of track two diplomacy may vary from a one-step action to long-term projects, and include observation, riot control conciliation and negotiation, joint reexamination of historical events, ecumenical prayers, establishing interfaith peace centers, rebuilding clinics, and creating new school curricula' on ethnic tolerance or aid distribution, depending on the needs of the specific place, time, and cultural impact.

The most powerful tool of a track two strategy has proven to-be a series of facilitated workshops that bring together representatives of groups in conflict for dialogues that target relational transformation and the integration of the society. Such workshops, as Montville observes, make it possible to undermine negative stereotypes and rehumanize relationships between the parties. "Dialogue, the engine of relationships, promotes mutual confirmation and thereby serves a fundamental need of parties to a conflict to be recognized as individuals with values and unique (and valued) identities."<sup>7</sup> Three projects that I have been involved in during recent years — Conflict Resolution Training for Religious People and Community Leaders from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, and Yugoslavia (Center for Strategic and International Studies), International Youth Camp for Israelis and Arabs, and for Turkish and Greek Cypriots (Seeds of Peace), and Crimea Dialogue (Search for Common Ground and Ukraine Mediation Group) — are typical and, at the same time, unique illustrations of this type of reconciliation effort. In the section that follows I will use the first project as an exemplar to more fully describe the implementation of a track two strategy. This project is of particular interest since its initial development and implementation took place when military actions between the parties were still active and hence made the dialogue particularly intense.

### An Exemplar for Track Two Projects: A Focus on Religion

In 1994 the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS, a Washington-based independent research institute focusing on international affairs) founded a project on conflict resolution training for representatives

7. Montville, *Healing Function in Political Conflict Resolution*, 115.

(Serbia and Montenegro) as a part of the Center's program on preventive diplomacy. Why religious communities? What does the conflict in the Balkans have to do with religion? Was this a religious war? These questions are often asked concerning contemporary conflicts (e.g., Northern Ireland) in which ethnicity and religious affiliation are intertwined. In my judgment, in its beginnings this conflict had nothing to do with differences in faith. It was mostly about dividing a pie of economic, territorial, and political power. When the conflict escalated, however, religion became part and parcel by virtue of its association with geographical location, organizational or denominational affiliation, or ethnicity. And although we may argue about the different roles that Orthodox, Catholic, or Muslim leadership played in the conflict's development, the fact is that the people came to perceive each other as threats and as enemies because of their religious affiliation and sometimes killed each other thinking that they were defending their cultural and religious heritage.

It was also evident in the Balkan conflict that right after peace was declared religious institutions and communities, by and large, found themselves in the midst of a most dramatic struggle, appealing for forgiveness in their general statements but not being able to stop blaming and judging each other. It is a long journey from pointing fingers to sharing responsibilities, to confession and repentance, perceived as an integral part of true reconciliation. In spite of these contradictions, only natural in this postwar period, the primary arena of religious activity is still the spiritual, emotional, and relational well being of people, issues that lie at the heart of the contemporary Balkan conflict. Therefore, as extensive evaluation has suggested, any sensitive efforts aimed at helping religious people deal with these questions are highly appreciated by those truly willing to contribute to the peace process. Besides, it is religion that possesses the most powerful traditions and tools, not to mention doctrines for peace building and reconciliation.

A seven-year study by CSIS scholars and practitioners that culminated in the book, *Religion: The Missing Dimension of Statecraft*, analyzes the role that religious activists from seven different parts of the world played in the constructive resolution of conflict within their respective societies." The

8. Johnston and Sampson, eds., *Religion*.

communities, and religious institutions. Pointing to tremendously underutilized resources in church communities that could be applied to peacemaking, the book set forth the base for our work with religious communities in Bosnia, Croatia, and Serbia. In our work we tried to implement the concepts at the center of this research by assisting the religious people and communities of the region in planting the seeds of long-term reconciliation.

Our project was designed to help the various religious communities to become empowered to pursue a variety of peace-building initiatives during postwar reconstruction. Our purpose was to develop a critical mass of support for such activities among religious and community leaders, and to get them to work together to overcome the stranglehold of ethnic division on both the individual and collective spirit of their people. We did this by identifying middle-level clergy and laity who had already shown leadership in areas of peace and justice and working with them to help them become more effective as agents for conflict resolution.

The project sponsored a series of three- to four-day seminars in community-building and conflict-resolution training, many of which had to be conducted in locations of violent confrontation and extreme suffering. The seminars were designed to promote interethnic trust, assist people to move beyond victimization, and provide tools for indigenous people to resolve their own internal and cross-cultural disputes.

### **An Exemplar for Track Two Projects:           The Structure of Workshops**

Seminars were structured around an experiential approach using group exercises, role-playing, presentations, and discussions. A working manual on conflict resolution, revised and distributed at each seminar, helped provide concrete resources. Furthermore, each seminar concluded with a session on future planning, out of which arose a variety of interfaith project initiatives for implementation locally. Examples include a mediation program in a Croatian church, a seminar in conflict resolution for young

book identifies situations where the potential exists for interventions by religious and spiritually motivated laypersons and speaks to political leaders, foreign policy

people in Serbia, a scholarly book on conflict resolution, and lectures given to Bosnian political parties by one of our workshop participants. All of these activities were done with materials developed in our seminars.

The seminars were organized on three levels, offered in sequence. First-level seminars served local constituencies and were focused primarily around community building. They were designed to help people face issues of grief and loss, heal grievances, share the contributions of their religious traditions to the task of peacemaking, build relations across ethno-religious lines, and examine the role of confession and forgiveness in reconciliation. With the entire spectrum of religious communities present (Muslim, Catholic, Orthodox, and others), the seminars succeeded in eliciting remarkably open dialogue relating to bias awareness, identity formation, and fears of the future.

Second-level seminars extended this work by bringing the alumni from the first-level workshops to a central location and providing them with the opportunity to help each other out of their isolation. These workshops, held within one country or region, focused on attitudinal change and skills development. In addition to reestablishing contacts within the larger community torn apart by war, the seminars helped people to clarify perspectives, assess their own style of handling conflict, and practice conflict-resolution skills (such as communication and mediation).

Third-level seminars further extended the work by helping the participants to identify specific creative roles for their religious communities in fostering social change, to understand where and how to motivate the individuals or structures, and to build competence in community organizing skills. The seminars were designed to help religious communities develop self-generating local programming. Examples include organizing ecumenical peace centers, interfaith counseling teams, mediation training teams, efforts for interethnic cooperation in community reconstruction, human rights advocacy, and interfaith programs for refugee resettlement.

In addition, we offered single confessional seminars to respond to the specific needs within any one particular religious community (with such a high degree of tension in the region at that time, each group faced very complicated issues regarding its self-identity and its role in society), and we organized international seminars in Hungary, which brought together past

workshop participants to create stronger ties between participants from Serbia, Croatia, and Bosnia, as well as to promote trust and coordination across republic lines. Finally, at the request of the participants, we held annual international seminars for a group of influential alumni to further facilitate dialogue and cooperation regarding future peace-building efforts, and we planned seminars to help prepare our alumni to interact with officials of greater influence regarding a variety of peacemaking issues.

Overall, our efforts were directed to local program development, with the intention of gradually turning over responsibility for this project to indigenous people and institutions. We began a cooperative relationship with the Center for Peace, Nonviolence, and Human Rights in Croatia, whereby our project became a part of their center, and investigated a similar arrangement in Serbia with MOST ("Bridge"), a Belgrade Center for Peace. We also sponsored the establishment of the Institute for Interfaith Dialogue in Sarajevo headed by one of our most active alumni. Notably, it quickly achieved a trustworthy reputation among multiple religious confessions in the area. In each country we helped develop an institutional framework and train a corps of people so that CSIS personnel could function only as initial consultants to the indigenous organizations in each country.

#### MOVING TOWARD RECONCILIATION: THE CENTRAL ROLE OF FORGIVENESS

Over six years of its operation, the Conflict Resolution Training for Religious People and Community Leaders from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, and Yugoslavia project was successful on several major fronts. First, we helped to develop workable relationships among leaders and laypersons of various denominations within the areas affected by violent conflict and across the new borders. Second, we helped people to better understand the conflict and its dimensions from the perspective of their adversary. Third, we developed strategies for dealing with conflict as a shared problem, whose solution resided in cooperative initiatives. And finally, from the many days we spent as active observers, trainers, and facilitators, we learned a great deal about the process of peace building.

The most significant lessons were:

- ◆ No skill training for problem solving was possible until the feelings of trauma were addressed and some basic healing from victimhood was achieved
- ◆ Achieving forgiveness, as the culmination of the healing process, made it possible for the parties to move forward to reconciliation.
- ◆ Forgiveness cannot be taught, preached, pointed out, or in any other way imposed by outsiders. However, a framework revealing its evolving, sometimes mysterious, nature was identified and proved to be very effective in facilitating dialogue.
- ◆ The most powerful tool of the workshops was the sharing of stories by individuals from opposite sides of conflict, stories that served as an initial bond of empathy in rebuilding trust.

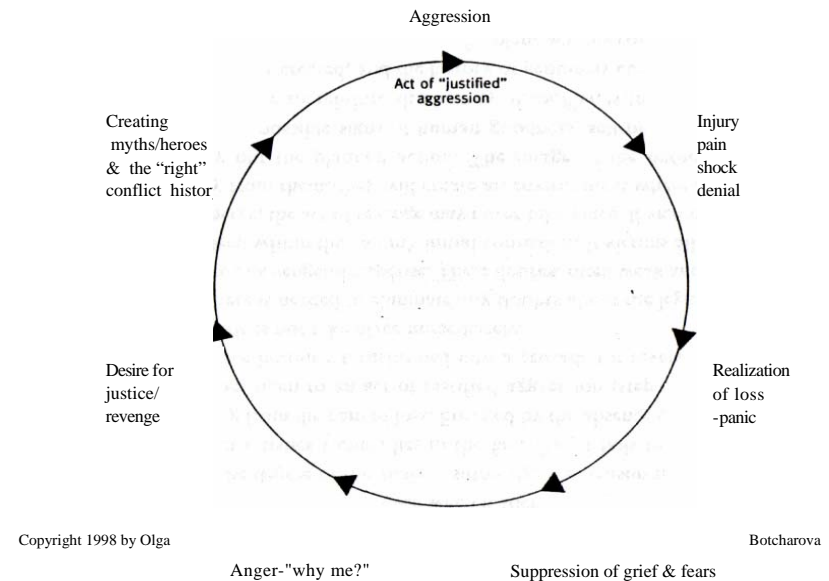
It had become evident quite early in our workshops that we faced a serious challenge in helping the participants to take yet another step toward resolving the conflict and achieving reconciliation. Before that step could be taken, the victims needed to understand that their sufferings were not to be dismissed but instead fully recognized, and that their anger and passion for justice were not wrong, inadequate, or illegitimate. The participants of our first seminar in Serbia were, for a long time, not able to speak from the bottom of their hearts and to get into meaningful dialogue with each other. The fears of being judged for feeling victimized were so strong that no one dared to take the risk of speaking from the heart. The room was filled with "nice" small talk and sophisticated theological discussions. That was not what we wanted to facilitate at the seminar, having spent two years in the most persistent efforts to include the Serbian Orthodoxy in the interfaith dialogue. By the end of the first day it became clear that unless the people could better understand victimization and what it does to all living beings they would not be able to choose freely between continuing to live as victims and beginning a journey toward healing.

### Cycle I: Seven Steps Toward Revenge

To address this unspoken need, I developed a diagram that assimilates the psychological stages of the dynamics between victimhood and aggres-

sion. It demonstrates, in other words, how natural human responses to harm and injustices may move people from being victims to becoming aggressors. This cycle (see fig. 14.1), gives full recognition to the victim's suffering, on one hand, but also to the logical and dangerous progression to escalating violence, on the other. What follows is a brief description of the process illustrated through the diagram.'

The cycle recognizes that victims of aggression experience tremendous pain as a result of serious physical, psychological, or moral injury (step i). The pain is often accompanied by shock, denial, and, eventually, panic. Victims initially experience a state of paralysis, an inability to comprehend the



**Figure 14.1 Seven Steps toward revenge**

9. The more explicit text may be found in the CSIS workshop manuals. It was published later as speaking notes for Woodstock Colloquium on Forgiveness in Conflict Resolution: Reality and Utility, by Woodstock Theological Center, Georgetown University, 1996

reality and respond to it, followed by denial, as an attempt to avoid facing the ugly gaping wound caused by severe loss.

Eventually, as victims begin to realize their loss, they can be overwhelmed by a profound fear of seeing the immediate horrible truth—loss of limbs and vital organs, of lifelong possessions, of loved ones—and the future it implies (step 2). Hence, as victims begin to realize their loss, what was a denial of the reality is supplanted by a denial, or suppression, of their grief and fears.

The denial grows in a "snowball effect" as emotions caused by loss become so closely associated with the loss itself that they come to be perceived as its source, and as such they evoke increasing fear and avoidance (step 3). Suppression of grief also serves as a way of hiding from shame, the most damaging factor in undermining self-esteem and sense of identity. The reasons for the suppression are, indeed, many and justifiable—there may be no time to attend to grief, as the victim's survival or the well-being of loved ones may demand demonstrated strength and immediate action. But, however justifiable the suppression, the grief and fears will not disappear.

Rather, the suppression serves to heighten feelings of anger directed toward the perpetrator, and often toward anything associated with the perpetrator—family, friends, neighbors, or members of the same political, national or religious group, or gender (step 4). Sometimes the anger is directed toward outsiders who were unable to prevent the loss, or even toward others who did not experience a similar loss. The whole world may be seen as hostile. Moreover, this anger may be "directed against innocent victims rather than the original object of the anger."<sup>10</sup> At this stage, victims often find themselves totally isolated in their anger and tormented by their victimhood. This state is typically expressed in the question, "Why me?"

Growing anger leads to the belief that healing will occur only if the perpetrator, perceived as the source of the pain, is destroyed. From the victim's perspective—dominated by confusion about the true source of the pain—revenge, justice, healing, punishment, and even problem solving, all become

10. G. R. Williams, "Negotiation as a Healing Process," *Journal of Dispute Resolution*, no. i (1996): 1-66 (Center for Dispute Resolution, University of Missouri-Columbia School of Law).

one and the same (step 5). The need to destroy the source of pain drives victims to seek uncompromising justice.

What often happens at this stage is that victims find themselves feeling even more abused, as in many cases, particularly in the presence of open conflict, no justice is achieved. Even when justice is achieved, it never seems adequate to the degree of the victim's suffering. The reason that executed justice seldom satisfies victims lies in the fact that it fails to provide the desired healing from the pain of loss. Enraged by the absence of justice, the victim becomes open to an act of justified aggression (step 6). Hence, a quest for justice becomes transformed into a crusade for revenge, though striking back does not take place immediately.

A pause here is needed to eliminate any doubts about the legitimacy or the evil nature of a vengeful response. These doubts, often weak and unclear, are hidden deep within the victim's initial confusion. If victims allow these doubts to emerge, the act of revenge may never take place. If victims choose to turn away from them, they will create an environment where it will be safe to carry out the planned action. The image of the perpetrator is deprived of any possible signs of human goodness; self-pity, blame, and demands for justice are reinforced; a history of conflict, with its myths, legends, and heroes is created, and the history of genuinely complex relationships is seen and presented as a chain of violent actions committed by the other side (step 7). Such a black-and-white mentality excludes the possibility of hearing any other voice. This mobilization of emotions and perceptions is fashioned to appeal to semi-repressed fears and anger, and requires rather manipulative behavior on the part of the victim, though he or she is often not fully aware of it.

Finally, when the victim performs the act of "justified" aggression, the cycle of violence is completed, with the roles now reversed. The former perpetrator now feels victimized, seeks revenge, and, finally, strikes again when an opportunity occurs.

Although the above pattern reflects typical tendencies in the development of victimhood, not all victims are doomed to become aggressors and not all conflicts turn into wars or violence. (The history of those conflict outcomes is yet to be written.) We, as a human race, would have ceased our existence on this planet long ago if the rationale of the vicious spiral had



constantly prevailed. Thus, the challenge for the participants of the workshops was to identify the mechanisms that resist the logic of conflict escalation and help to break the cycle of revenge. Before addressing these issues and before sharing their stories, the participants were encouraged to reflect silently on the choices that they had made as victims in conflict, whether those choices were related to individuals or their identity groups. (It seems sometimes too embarrassing to admit to the confusion and weakness behind such choices in the presence of the other side. Initial sharing may take place within the safety of their own group.) I believe that these quiet moments are very important as true transformation takes place in the setting of deep intimacy.

After examining the logic of revenge, some of the participants of our first seminar in Serbia, who had strongly avoided addressing the conflict, finally began to share the most powerful stories of their struggle with victimhood, including giving recognition to certain manipulative aspects of their behavior as an ethnic group. Some of the stories told by our participants of different workshops, typical for a violent ethnic conflict, had a shared non-typical continuation.

The story of Ivo, a Franciscan brother whose old parents were killed in front of him in their home in Sarajevo by Muslim soldiers, or of Dragomir, a Serbian Orthodox priest pulled out of his house at night and shot by Croats who then left him to die, or of Bojo, a Protestant layperson who together with his sixteen-year-old daughter was humiliated, tortured, and sent to walk through a minefield by Serbian gunmen.

All these individuals who survived atrocities, who faced death, and who seemed to have a legitimate right to hatred and revenge, instead dedicated their lives to peacemaking. Moreover, some of them tried to reach the other side and communicate their forgiveness and at least one succeeded in restoring a relationship with his direct abusers. Such stories became turning points at our seminars. Having heard them other participants who had been unable to let their hatred go felt challenged and inspired to take the risk and tell their own stories of suffering, thus beginning their healing. The process was often accompanied with immense inner struggles for overcoming fears, pain, shame, and helplessness of victimhood. Not everyone was able to come to forgiveness within a few days of the seminar, but most began their journeys with the first steps toward healing.

## HUMAN NATURE: THE PHYSICAL AND SPIRITUAL

The continuing dialogue focused primarily on the psychological and spiritual aspects of forgiveness, identified as a force that breaks the cycle of revenge. The early stage of the discussion often began with remembering small secret doubts that, in spite of the evident tightness of the victims, prevented them from striking back. The origin of such doubts does not seem clear, as they do not belong to either reason or mind, or to our emotions. They are articulated by an inner voice, of which there is no objective proof, the voice that comes from the very depth of a soul (a word that in Slav languages indicates a place for spirit in a human being, "*dusha*"). Mihailo Mihailov, a contemporary Russian philosopher who completed most of his work while locked in Yugoslav prisons during Tito's regime, wrote explicitly about the meaning of the soul and faith from the perspective of achieving individual liberation and gaining social political freedom."

By exploring a side of human nature that "in spite of threat of physical destruction and against all the dictates of reason" sometimes resists a vengeful response the workshop participants were reunited in their rediscovery of spirituality. Similar to the experiences of many political prisoners, as described by Mihailov, exposed to all possible physical and moral humiliation, the participants who survived atrocities of ethnic cleansing came to the conclusion that turning away from the inner voice, in other words, betraying the soul, was the worst evil.<sup>11</sup> However, by obeying the voice of the soul, they reconnected with the source of the spiritual power that releases them from all fears and, thus, from anger.

In the story of Bojo, even knowing that he and his daughter were to be killed at any moment, he experienced relief and, in a way, joy, because, unlike their abusers, though given the opportunity, he had not committed an act of evil. He had chosen not to run his vehicle over the three gunmen when they had been trying to stop his car. Now, in the face of certain death, he felt great moral strength and a freedom from fear that could not be taken from him by any outside force including death. Mihailov writes, "To obey

11. M. Mihailov, *Underground Notes* (New Rochelle, N.Y.: Caratzus Brothers, 1982).  
Ibid., 13.

12.

the inner voice means nothing less than to define actions in time in terms of eternity," meaning that belief in the immortality of the spiritual power with which a person comes to associate himself, removes the basic fear of death, which is the source of all other earthly fears. In other words, the spiritual takes over and overcomes the major natural human reactions that are rooted in our fears and in the instinct of survival. As a result of the struggle at moments of severe suffering, a struggle that "demands separation from everything except the soul," the most tragic human calamities are viewed through a different lens, from the perspective of an achieved freedom (salvation) and new wisdom.<sup>13</sup> The most dramatic events are seen rather as challenging life experiences, lessons to be learned and problems to be solved. Moreover, the victims who trust their inner voice and act upon that faith, as their stories record, often experience not only spiritual salvation but also miraculous rescue from physical dangers. (It is interesting to note that similar discussions also occurred with groups of people who did not identify themselves as believers, but who reported strong empirical experiences of a mysterious spiritual strength following an inner voice that made them recognize its empowering presence in situations where they had made tremendous sacrifices.)

The discussions concerning physical and spiritual identities of people had important implications for the continuing development of the dialogue between the parties in conflict. First, the participants began to realize the existence of a unifying connection, which, in the context of conflict, with its stereotypes and "black-and-white" thinking, allowed inclusion of the other and "re-humanizing of the enemy." Second, forgiveness was seen as a complex phenomenon, an intimate spiritual dialogue with one's own soul, a blessing from God and relief from pain. As such, it could not be guaranteed, traded, or demanded. Suzanne R. Freeman and Robert D. Enright noted that the success of the interveners working with victims of abuse applying forgiveness therapy was to a great degree due to the fact that the word *forgiveness* was not even mentioned in the process.<sup>14</sup> Thus every victim had an opportunity to walk towards forgiveness at his or her own pace

13. *Ibid.*, 25.

14. Suzanne R. Freeman and Robert D. Enright, "Forgiveness as an Intervention Goal with Incest Survivors," *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* 64, no. 5 (1996): 983-92

and experience the act of forgiving in his or her unique fashion with no pressure. At the same time, there is a required condition of being attuned to the inner voice, the voice of faith. Third, the stories of the victims who were transformed as a result of the most severe suffering served as powerful examples of how inner faith can be strengthened, as suffering was the path to the very depth of the soul.

From the perspective of psychology we cannot ignore or suppress suffering if we want to develop our sense of selves, our identities, and become happier and stronger. Demanding recognition for their suffering from the others, the victims have to learn to respect their own suffering themselves—instead of ignoring or suppressing it. It is with addressing the pain of loss and developing a different attitude toward suffering that breaking the cycle of victimhood begins.

## SEVEN STEPS TOWARD RECONCILIATION

In this section I will illustrate and discuss the second cycle, Seven Steps Toward Reconciliation (see fig. 14.2), which captures the stages of transformation from being victimized, through processing of suffering, toward healing, forgiveness, and future reconciliation. The model was developed based on many days of observation, training, and facilitation with the religious leaders and laity from the full spectrum of religious communities (Muslim, Catholic, Orthodox, and others). The description that follows represents my interpretation, analysis, and assimilation of the extensive dialogue engaged in during the workshops.

While the victims' immediate experience of aggression or abuse does not leave room for any reaction or processing, it is possible to begin to process the suffering as soon as initial realization of loss occurs (step 1).

The victims have to allow themselves to feel the pain, to stay with it in order to be able to leave it later (step 1). They have to learn how to cry instead of hide their tears. By mourning, they are saying goodbye to the past, and to whom they were in that past. By expressing feelings of sadness and grief, they are, in a way, beginning to separate from their pain. The more they release, the more they will be free from it. (Participants were

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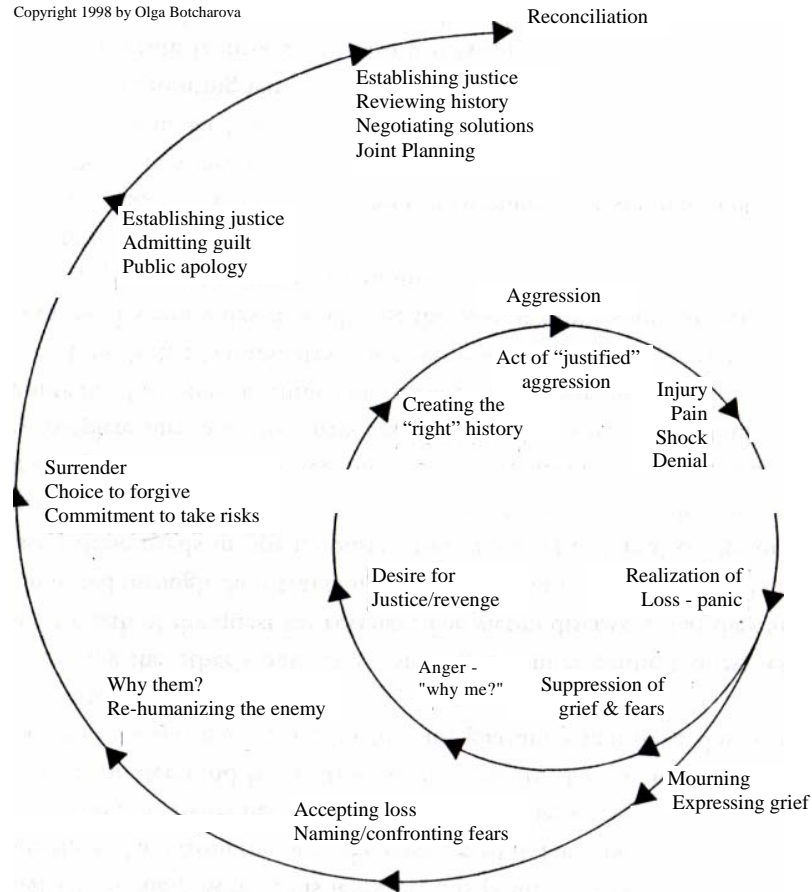


Figure 14.2. Seven Steps Toward Forgiveness

encouraged to explore the tremendous resources that their cultures and religions offer in dealing with grief.)

The first steps in healing require restoring love to oneself. Forgiveness begins for the victims when they make themselves look at the "ugly gaping wound" caused by loss and confront the secret shame and guilt that accompany the damage to the sense of self-identity (step 3). The process of

attending and overcoming the shame is as painful as the process of opening and cleansing the wound, which is needed in order to give it a chance to heal. Confronting the fears of their new reality requires identifying and naming each fear, recognizing them one by one. Only by pulling them out of the darkness, admitting them, sorting them out, do we deprive them of the power that they have over us. As victims we are usually more fearful of the emotions that accompany our fears than of the fears themselves. Recognizing and expressing these emotions may help victims not to turn these emotions into anger. This process takes time and courage, but victims are rewarded with the ability to think of fears as challenges of life rather than as fatal tragedies.

Continuously questioning themselves with "Why me?" fails to provide an acceptable answer (no one deserves to be treated unfairly, moreover, to become a victim of aggression or abuse) and prevents victims from further accepting their reality. If they want to restore their sanity, their ability to think rationally, and if they can yet realize that they were in no way at fault for what happened, they need to reframe the question to "Why them?" ("what made them, these particular people, do it to us?"). The reframing may be approached gradually, beginning with the question "Why not me?" (or "If not me, who then?"). The search for an answer evokes tremendous resistance, as victims are used to thinking of the other side as "nonhuman" (it is easier to destroy someone who is not as human or as good as we are). All of the victims' stereotypes get mobilized, blocking the search that might reveal any similarity between the victims and the aggressors. Hence the answer, "They are just crazy," sometimes prevents the further journey. Victims are left, then, in even greater panic, confronted with the possibility of an unpredictable attack, as craziness is not a subject to any rational control. If the evil is senseless, they will never know how to resist it. On the other hand, if victims allow themselves to continue the search, they may discover that however brutal or criminal the actions of the aggressor may have been, the basic needs that drive such actions are usually very human and are usually related to fear and hopelessness, feelings that are so familiar to the victims. (I want to again emphasize the importance of direct emotional interaction between the people from opposite sides of the conflict. Nothing seems as important as the sharing of personal experiences through their

stories.) In fact, victims may discover that they and the aggressors have very similar, if not common, concerns and beliefs. Thus, in trying to get away from their own pain and fears, victims begin to feel the hidden pain and fears of their enemy/aggressor. Rejection and then confusion gradually give way to a sense of affinity and even compassion. At this stage, the enemy becomes re-humanized (step 4). Moreover, from the perspective of a believer, if the one who performed the act of evil is human, then the aggressor is a child of God and as such must have a soul and love of God. Although the act of aggression continues to be perceived as evil, the perpetrator is now seen more as a person who had become disconnected from his own spiritual self by the power of his fears. At this point the victim begins to separate the evil act from the one who committed it. He is perceived as a sinner, a lost soul, overwhelmed by his fears, who perhaps needs love and help in order to understand his sinfulness and restore the connection with the source of the spiritual strength—the only guarantee that the evil will not be committed again.

Feeling the other's pain and restoring the inner connectedness lessens the strength of the quest for revenge. The victim discovers that they are all connected through their fears and basic needs, and their human inability to assert these needs in open, constructive ways. After initial confusion and unwillingness to let the anger go (anger may have served as the only source of energy for a victim), a deep inner transformation takes place that leads to complete surrender to a new openness. In this way, victims find a tranquility in which they feel much more united with their spiritual center. Inclusion of the "other" culminates in forgiveness. Forgiveness relieves the victims from the desperate desire to change the past; it evolves into an acceptance of the present and openness to an unknown future. Forgiveness is the culmination of healing, the most vital need of a victim, and a way to freedom from victimhood. As such, it creates solid ground for developing a new identity. The past cannot be restored, but the transformed person is no longer the person who needs that past. Forgiveness reveals the true meaning of suffering, as a reuniting with the spiritual strength on a deeper level. It transforms suffering from a curse into a blessing. This is the time when the spiritual core of human nature is celebrated. The spiritual power of forgiveness allows the victims to ask vulnerability. The forgiving one is vul-

nerable to rejection—the aggressor may not care about being forgiven, may avoid communication out of a fear of revenge, and moreover, may even return to strike again, blinded by his fears. However, at this stage, the former victim's newly found strength allows him to take those risks. The commitment to forgiveness and the intensification of the inner dialogue with God are motivated by a personal need for complete healing, which now becomes focused on communicating the forgiveness to the perpetrator. The act of injustice is experienced as an extreme form of rejection of love, the love that all human beings so much crave and without which we cannot exist. For this need, we are sometimes prepared to sacrifice our physical survival.

Having rediscovered love through a most challenging journey, the former victim believes that there is some hope that the perpetrator might be encouraged to step along a similar path. Thus, the forgiving victim offers a safe embrace for the perpetrator to respond to the call of forgiveness (step 5). Yet an even greater labor of love may be required to open the former aggressor's heart and remove his fears of the future.

Since forgiveness is a culmination of healing, and a primary need of the victim, it is unconditional in nature. Reconciliation, however, is based on two key conditions, forgiveness and justice. Forgiveness provides a different imperative for seeking justice—reintegration of the relationship between former victims and aggressors in a new, safe surrounding designed and built by both sides. And this justice, oriented to the future, presumes a leading role for the former victim in its formulation and focuses on the perpetrator's admitting guilt (step 6). The idea of punishment resides in the exposure of the perpetrator to the shame of the wrongdoing. The suffering that accompanies the process of repentance serves as "purification" and a guarantee of inner transformation. (This interpretation of justice has a rich tradition in the works of Dostoyevsky and other spiritual writers.)

The second major component of establishing justice implies coming to terms with the past. It requires a "walk through history," examining the wounds on all sides and recognizing mutual responsibilities.<sup>11</sup> We cannot build a future if we remain afraid to know our past. Painful memories must be examined and a joint history written, free from the biases of national

15. *Montville, Arrow and the Olive Branch*

mythologies (step 7). Continued conflicts are directly related to unhealed wounds. (Ex-Yugoslavia is a typical example. After World War II, during the Tito era, Serbs and Croats went back to living side by side, but discussion of the atrocities of war was practically forbidden.) Silence serves as a continuing suppression of fears. "Re-writing" history opens the way to a cooperative approach, based on newly gained recognition and respect for each other's suffering. Only then can negotiations on the practical issues of preserving restored relationships and changing the structures of the sociopolitical environment lead to true reconciliation.

The following are excerpts from the comments of the participants of our workshops in the former Yugoslavia. These reflect their experiences and the growth that manifested from their being able to confront their victimhood. These passages are indicative of how their viewpoints had been affected:

During those three days that the seminar was taking place, I have learned more in some areas than during my entire life (61 years).

I was not aware of the value of grieving before.

We need awareness of our potential power to change the present situation.

I felt stimulated when we were talking about overcoming the fear. I learned about a need for the healing of the collective spirit.

I have discovered much new about myself. We are both victims and aggressors to each other.

I discovered the feelings of refugees. . . . I became aware of the benefit of gradual steps in conflict resolution (it is the "little people" that form a base for reconciliation). I have experienced my own feeling of being a victim. I have my peace of heart now and I have more strength to help others come along a similar path I am better able to listen to other people.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter I argue for the critical role of track two diplomacy in dealing with contemporary conflicts, filling the void left by the often rationalized, politicized and militarized approaches of official (track one) diplomatic initiatives. The shortcomings of track one diplomacy lie in its failure to attend, in any meaningful way, to the many people who have, fallen victim to conflict. While we stop the hostilities and impose an immediate "peace," we fail to address the victims' suffering or healing, and we seldom invite them as partners, or even as contributors, in developing and implementing peace processes.

I presented and discussed a particular approach to crafting and implementing peace-building initiatives from a track two perspective, which derives from an explicit recognition of the importance of perceptual, social-psychological, and spiritual dimensions of peace building. More concretely, this approach recognizes that attending to the relationships among the people ravaged by conflict is essential to achieving a peace that is sustainable. Further, religious leaders and laity are identified as having to play a central role in resolving conflicts in many parts of the world.

I derived the model from the training and facilitation workshops that I engaged in with the leaders of ethnic and religious communities in Bosnia, Serbia, and Croatia, and other professionals in conflict resolution and I have since used it in various parts of the world. The concept of forgiveness is at the core of the model and is seen as the culmination of a healing process that makes it possible for the parties in conflict to move forward to reconciliation. Without it there is little hope for a sustainable peace, but achieving it is a formidable challenge. Forgiveness is seen as evolving and mysterious and as something that cannot be simply taught, indoctrinated, or imposed. It can, however, be fostered through thoughtful, sensitive, facilitated dialogue among the parties to a conflict. In the chapter I present a framework for dialogue that reveals the nature of forgiveness and describes 'the stages and processes through which it may be achieved.

Because of its centrality to achieving a sustainable peace and reconciliation, forgiveness must be considered as a practical and strategically important issue in the policy of peace building. Within this framework, "outsiders"

must be willing to go beyond "fixing the problem" and to reach beyond the traditional political hierarchies, to create an environment that allows those hurt by conflict to find and nurture their capacity for forgiveness.