

A CASE STUDY OF THE MATZEVAH FOUNDATION: LEADING IN THE THIRD SPACE

Introduction

I conducted a case study of The Matzevah Foundation (TMF) by first analyzing the response of Jews and Christians to TMF and its work. Second, I explored in what ways Jews and Christians learned how to dialogue within the construct of the third space—the liminal space of the Jewish cemetery in Poland. TMF works with community and governmental leaders in Poland, and has developed collaborative partnerships with Jewish and secular institutions in the U.S., Europe, and Poland. This diverse group of people is connected through the work of TMF in caring for and restoring neglected Jewish cemeteries in Poland.

In its mission of restoration and education, TMF engages volunteers of whom roughly 75 percent are local residents and the remainder of the volunteers are from abroad. These volunteers gather and cooperate in a series of Jewish cemetery restoration projects during the summer in cities and communities in Poland where Jewish communities once thrived. Volunteer participants typically in each project are involved in an intensive week of labor in which they experience first-hand the loss of the Shoah by cleaning or removing debris, cutting brush and undergrowth, and restoring some aspect of the Jewish cemetery that were desecrated during and after World War II. Usually, volunteers spend free time together, such as going for coffee, having casual conversations, or interacting with each other in structured environments where difficult issues are explored.

As a qualitative researcher, my role in this case study was direct and more in line with that of being both a participant and a participant observer. The purpose of my investigation was to describe the process of how acts of loving-kindness (mercy), as demonstrated and encountered through the work of TMF, in caring for and restoring Jewish cemeteries in Poland, have influenced dialogue (or lack thereof) among Jews and Christians. My research explored mercy as the language of dialogue, and the organization that I lead, TMF, illustrated that dialogue. Mercy was operationalized and understood in terms of “loving acts” (Johnson, 2012, p. 127); loving acts were corroborated by humane orientation, concern for others, or compassion, charity, and altruism.

Due to long-standing religious, racial, and cultural tensions, a complex and challenging relationship exists between Jews and Christians. The resulting breach isolates and separates these two faith groups from each other. Subsequently, they struggle to interact and engage in meaningful dialogue, which could repair the breach and lead to forgiveness and reconciliation. Dialogue bridges the gap between Jew and Christian allowing them to meet in the third space—the liminal space of the Jewish cemetery in Poland. Jews and Christians may deal with the evil of the past through what researchers term as loving acts.

Background

In 1933, Hitler became Chancellor of Germany and led Nazi Germany toward war, and the historical cataclysm of the Shoah, or what is frequently termed the Holocaust. Many people consider that anti-Semitism was the basis of the Third Reich’s decision to implement the Final Solution to the Jewish Question in Poland. However, this is not the case. The Nazis strategically adopted Poland as their surrogate for “their gigantic laboratory for mass murder,” solely for the

reason that Poland was the home to the most significant European Jewish population (Zimmerman, 2003, p. 3).

Following “the *Erschütterung*, ‘shock’ of Auschwitz” (Fackenheim, 2002, para. 8), it is apparent that something within the framework of Christian theology and social consciousness needed to change. Nevertheless, nothing substantially altered in the Christian outlook. Many Christians “attempted to pick up and continue as though no rupture had occurred, and no transformation was required” (Karpen, 2002, p. 139). Krajewski (2005) declares, “In general, Christian-Jewish dialogue nowhere began before World War II” (p. 207). The profound terrors of the Shoah, and the “break in history” it produced, justifiably led *some* Jews and Christians to realize their need for dialogue.

Concomitantly, Krajewski specifies that “the shock of the Shoah” coupled with “the establishment of the state of Israel led to a deeper dialogue in the West;” however, he maintains that “in Poland, the shock [of the Shoah] was almost non-existent, and certainly not expressed” (p. 207). Krajewski reasons that this inimitable reality in post-war Poland is understandable, and is perhaps due to the acuteness of “general Polish suffering” (p. 207) and the proximity “of the death camps made reflection harder” (p. 208). Furthermore, he states that Christian-Jewish dialogue in Poland did not emerge until after the *Nostra Aetate* statement and the communist forced emigration of Jews in 1968 and 1969; only then did the “Polish-Catholic intellectuals began the work of establishing the early stages of dialogue” (p. 209).

Apart from the dissimilar circumstances in Poland following the war, in 1947, a group of Christians and Jews met formally in Seelisberg, Switzerland, so that they might mutually declare their collective anguish about the Shoah, their wish to confront anti-Semitism, and “their desire

to foster stronger relationships between Jews and Christians” (International Council of Christians and Jews, 2009, p. 2).

In more recent times, Karpen (2002) states that Jewish-Christian dialogue “has become commonplace” (p. 4); nonetheless, it is still challenging. Moreover, he posits that the events of the Shoah are “exercising a powerful transforming effect not only upon Judaism but also upon Christianity” (p. 205). Broad swaths of “the Christian Church have begun a process of abandoning the teaching of contempt” and have started to discard anti-Judaistic theological teachings (p. 205). Kress (2012) views Jewish-Christian interaction as primarily improving because Christians have completely re-evaluated their “attitude toward Jews and Judaism” (para. 1). Despite these efforts, Christians and Jews remain divided and struggle to interact.

Research Questions

In order to explore how those involved and those affected by the work of The Matzevah Foundation have developed in their relationship to one another, I pursued the following research questions:

1. How have Jews and Christians responded to the work of The Matzevah Foundation?
2. In what ways do Jews and Christians learn how to dialogue through their mutual interaction within the context of the work of The Matzevah Foundation?

Research Methods

A case study method proved to be the best methodological approach for investigating the work of TMF. Through inquiry, I sought to understand how Jews and Christians respond to the work of TMF—the third space, and in what ways people learn to dialogue within the framework of the Jewish cemetery in Poland. Additionally, I wanted to determine whether or not loving acts

or acts of loving-kindness influenced attitudes and created mutual bridges of understanding, which might serve as the underpinning for dialogue.

Principally, I examined the responses of people individually and corporately to open-ended questions about their experience in working with TMF in its educational initiatives and its Jewish cemetery restoration projects in Poland. I selected specific participants (and sites) primarily for this study using the criterion of Patton (2002) as to whether or not participants are “information-rich” (p. 237), and who had knowledge of, and experience in working with TMF in the U.S. or Poland. I prepared seven fundamental and open-ended interview questions, which I used in conducting individual and focus group interviews.

Participants in this study were derived from a pool of 15 individuals, as demonstrated in Table 1, who have had interaction with the work of TMF. Of the 15 individual selected for the study, 11 individuals have had direct association and interaction with me personally, or in some capacity of my leadership of TMF. Four individuals were selected from two summer project locations in Poland and were interviewed along with four other TMF volunteers and board members in two focus groups. Six participants were Jewish, while six individuals were Christians; the remaining three participants were non-Jewish and primarily non-religious.

Table 1: *Demographic Composition of Research Sample*

	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentages</i>
<u>Age Group</u>		
20-35	7	46.7
36-45	3	20.0
46+	5	33.3
Total	15	100.0
<u>Educational Level</u>		
Bachelors	7	46.7
Masters/Doctorates	8	53.3

	Total	15	100.0
<u>Religious Identity</u>			
Jewish		6	40.0
Christian		6	40.0
Not Stated		3	20.0
	Total	15	100.0
<u>Nationality</u>			
American		10	66.7
Polish		2	13.3
United Kingdom		3	20.0
	Total	15	100.0
<u>Gender</u>			
Male		6	40.0
Female		9	60.0
	Total	15	100.0

Key Literature

A Talmudic Leadership Principle

Embedded within the Talmud, we discover an essential leadership principle: “One who causes others to perform [*me’aseh*] a meritorious act is greater than one who performs that act himself” (“Bava Batra 9a,” 2017). First, *me’aseh* or *ma’aseh* means “the work” (“Ma’aseh,” 2019), or doing the work, while second, a “meritorious act” is known as a *mitzvah* (*mitzvot*, plural)—a righteous act fulfilling one of the 613 commandments of Jewish Law (*Halakhah*).

The kernel of truth found within this Talmudic principle is that the one who leads, or “causes others” (“Bava Batra 9a,” 2017) to do the *work* of the *mitzvah* is superior to the one who merely does the *mitzvah*. In light of this concept, Jacobs (n.d.) points out that individuals “can do much” in tackling the needs around them; nonetheless, she concludes, “We can be even more effective when we mobilize others to join us in these efforts” (para., 22). Hughes, Ginnett, and

Curphy (2012) echo this conclusion and assert that leadership is “the process of influencing an organized group toward accomplishing its goals” (p. 5). For the purpose of this study, leadership, therefore, may be mostly understood as accomplishing work through others.

Moreover, combining leadership concepts from Fiedler’s work in 1981 and Hollander’s contributions in 1978, Hughes et al. (2012) consider that leadership is a cooperative effort. They argue that leadership is a mutual process that is ongoing in the context of a relationship between a leader and followers in which the leader influences the group to realize its goals within the construct of an “interactional framework,” consisting of “three elements—the leader, the follower, and the situation” (p. 15).

Micah 6:8

Researchers and authors (e.g., Melé & Sánchez-Runde, 2013; Purpel, 2008; Stenger, 2006; Wolf, 2010a) indicate that there is a standard, moral framework for humanity as a basis to interact with our neighbors in the communities in which we live. Wolf (2010b) indicates that Malloch “argues that historically, the spiritual capital of Protestant business persons focuses on the three virtues of faith, hope, and charity” (p. 8). According to Wolf (2010b), Malloch subsequently maintains that a “Jesus-shaped *worshipview* [sic] . . . yields a worldview triad of leadership discipline (faith), social compassion (charity), and persevering justice (hope)” (p. 8).

Consequently, I may connect Malloch’s “three virtues of faith, hope, and charity” to a moral template or pattern consisting of justice, mercy, and humility. Although some would question the source of these values, these three moral values, as seen in Micah 6:8, are transcendent and universal and in themselves a moral standard.

The prophet Micah wrote, “He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God”

(ESV, 2016). Hyman (2005) states that the rabbis determined that Micah 6:8 “by virtue of its three principles of doing justice, loving mercy, and walking humbly with God,” captured the essence of the 613 commandments in the *Halakhah* (p. 157). According to Hyman (2005) the core of Micah 6:8 is based on a tripartite pattern of a simple string of three verbs emphasizing “*doing, loving, and walking*—connected to three basic moral values—*justice, mercy, and humility*,” which “make it comprehensible and easy to remember” (p. 164).

Telushkin (2006) asserts that the prophet Micah teaches us that “God’s primary demand of human beings is to act righteously [or justly]” (p. 14). Telushkin expounds and says that God does not require from us sacrifices or religious rituals; “rather, God’s most significant demands are justice, compassion, and humility” (p. 14).

The Torah teaches that justice is focused upon our actions toward others. On the authority of Telushkin (2001), the Hebrew word *zedakah* is translated as justice or righteousness, and “it is usually translated, somewhat inaccurately as charity” (p. 573). He elaborates further by stating that acting justly “is perhaps the most important obligation Judaism imposes on the Jew” (p. 573). By extension, justice means that we are to be fair in how we deal with other people. We are not to lie, cheat, or steal. If people seek justice, they help others, the oppressed, and care for orphans and widows. These actions express mercy.

In the Micah 6:8, the concept of mercy originated from the Hebrew word, *chesed*, which means treating others with kindness, or more accurately with loving-kindness. Mercy may also be expressed as *chesed shel emet*, meaning (חסד של אמת) literally “kindness of truth” or true loving-kindness (Sienna, 2006, p. 79).

Mercy is also an action—*gemilut chasadim*, which is the giving of loving-kindness. This type of kindness shows concern or care for others; furthermore, we understand this sort of

kindness as compassion. When considering the burial of the dead *gemilut chasadim*, or acts of loving-kindness, is viewed as “par excellence because it necessarily is done without any hope that the ‘recipient’ will repay the good deed” (Telushkin, 1994, p. 25). Furthermore, Telushkin (1994) indicates that a rabbi, Haffetz Hayyim, considered *gemilut chasadim* as “any good deed that one does for another without getting something in return (*Ahavat Chesed*)” (p. 25). The Talmud considers compassion to be “the hallmark of an ethical person,” and it “is *the* defining characteristic of being a Jew” (Telushkin, 2006, p. 20).

Humane Orientation

Deeds of loving-kindness lay the bridge of mercy. By mobilizing Jews and Christians to engage in this *mitzvah*, they may come to terms with the past trauma brought about by long-term anti-Semitism, anti-Judaism, and the Shoah through dealing with such evil today utilizing “loving acts” (Johnson, 2012, p. 127). Johnson (2012) considers that “Scott Peck is not alone in arguing that loving acts can overcome evil” (p. 127). Peck (2012) defines love in this manner: “Love is as love does. Love is an act of will—namely, both an intention and an action. Will also implies choice” (p. 83, loc. 1078). Therefore, loving acts are actions that flow out of love or concern for others. The concept of loving acts may be academically linked to humane orientation.

Humane orientation may be defined as “the degree to which individuals in organizations or societies encourage and reward individuals for being fair, altruistic, friendly, generous, caring, and kind to others” (Javidan & Dastmalchian, 2009). Kabaskal and Bodur (2004) explain further that “this dimension is manifested in the way people treat one another and in the social programs institutionalized within each society” (p. 569). Simply stated, humane orientation is concerned with the welfare of humanity.

Descriptions of humane behavior are not new but have existed since antiquity and “ideas and values” related to this dimension may be found among “classic Greek philosophers” and “in the teachings of many of the major religions of the world” (Kabaskal & Bodur, 2004, p. 565). The principal idea embedded in the classical Greek understanding concerning this human attribute is reciprocal, as well as mutual love found in friendship. Humans are interrelated and connected to each other; therefore, love or concern for others is a fundamental expression of humanity.

Ethic of Remembering

Karpen (2002) offers three critical theoretical insights as to how Christians *might* conceptually respond to the Shoah. First, he argues for the need for “an ethic of remembering” (p. 205). Second, he maintains that there needs to be “a way to place memory [of the Shoah] closer to the heart of Christianity” (p. 205). Third, by way of inference, he provides a glimpse as to how to remember and bring the memory of the Shoah “closer to the heart of Christianity” by working “together on the task of *tikkun olam*, the repair of the world” (p. 206).

Karpen’s three postulates provide for me a seedbed to root my theory, which I am exploring as a means to bridge the chasm and close the gap between Jews and Christians. Briefly, I may reorder Karpen’s concepts and express them in this way: remembering, repairing the world, and bringing the memory closer to Christians by working together with Jews. In this manner, I may link Karpen’s concepts to the work of TMF, which is guided by three analogous principles: remembering, restoring, and reconciling.

Dialogue

Dialogue may be a confusing and unclear term. It is more than a conversation, and it is undoubtedly more than a discussion. It is not a debate. According to Isaacs (1999), dialogue is

not a discussion and is not centered on “making a decision” by ruling out options, which leads to “closure and completion” (p. 45). The root connotation of decision means to “murder the alternative” (Isaacs, 1999, p. 45). Dialogue, on the other hand, does not rule out options. As claimed by Isaacs (1999), dialogue means “a shared inquiry, a way of thinking and reflecting together” (p. 9). Dialogue seeks to discover new options, which provide insight, and a means by which to reorder knowledge, “particularly the taken-for-granted assumptions that people bring to the table” (Isaacs, 1999, p. 45).

Subsequently, dialogue in the context of this study means “a shared inquiry, a way of thinking and reflecting together” (Isaacs, 1999, p. 9). In this light, Isaacs views dialogue as occurring in terms of a relationship with someone else. He contends that dialogue is not about our “effort to make [that person] understand us;” it is about people coming “to a greater understanding about [themselves] and each other” (Isaacs, 1999, p. 9). Shady and Larson (2010) point to Buber’s work in dialogue, which advocates “a shared reality where all partners in the dialogue come to understand each other’s position, even if they do not entirely agree with it” (p. 83).

The vital aspect of dialogue is seeing new outcomes and the opening of the way to pursue them. Dialogue may be linked with liminal space and create the possibility of changing the status quo, or the way things are in Jewish and Christian interaction.

Findings

My first research question for this study asked: How have Jews and Christians responded to the work of The Matzevah Foundation? From the interviews, observations, and other data, I discovered that Jews and Christians reacted primarily to the work of TMF by responding in five significant ways. First, they responded by developing relationships as they cooperated in the

work of TMF. Second, in terms of loving acts, they cared for Jewish cemeteries in Poland. Third, Jews and Christians remembered the Shoah and linked remembering with action to preserve the memory of Poland's Jewish past. Fourth, Jews and Christians engaged in *Tikkun Olam* as they worked with each other to repair the world of forgotten Jewish resting places in Poland. Fifth, in practical terms, Jews and Christians experienced reconciliation by working together to care for Jewish cemeteries in Poland.

My second research question was: In what ways do Jews and Christians learn how to dialogue through their mutual interaction within the context of the work of The Matzevah Foundation? The data revealed a framework for dialogue emerging from Jewish and Christian interaction within the context of TMF. The TMF framework of Jewish-Christian dialogue consists of seven components: addressing proselytism, developing common ground, gaining understanding, building a sense of community, speaking about matters of faith, confronting the present past, and overcoming differences among them. The findings also shed light on the experience of dialogue within the realm of TMF's work and discovered a potential model for Jewish and Christian dialogue.

Discussion

First in my discussion of my findings, I will consider the critical aspects of my findings as they relate to the five distinct ways in which Jews and Christians responded to the work of TMF. Except for reconciliation, I will pair and discuss the following findings as couplets: relationships and caring, and remembering and restoration. Second, I will discuss in what way Jews and Christians learned to dialogue within the framework of TMF. Finally, within my treatment of the findings, I will examine how the findings might be applied to real-life circumstances that leaders may face in their respective leadership fields.

Relationships and Caring

Jews and Christians first responded to the work of TMF by building and developing relationships through caring, loving, or compassionate acts. Kessler (2013) defines dialogue in terms of a relationship and states, “dialogue begins with the individual, not with the community” (p. 53). What this means for my study is that if relationships are defined by interpersonal interaction, then relationships are a crucial factor in determining if genuine dialogue is possible among Jews and Christians interacting within the construct of TMF. Resolving conflict between groups is not achieved in a vacuum and without effort.

For example, Participant-1 considers the work of TMF with the Jewish community as “bridge-building.” He states, “What you are doing is building a bridge to the Jews. You have no guidebook, no example to follow, but you keep at it, learning as you go.” Consequently, he declares, “We Jews should meet you halfway.” Participant-1 also considers the bridge-building efforts of TMF as a means to develop “inter-religious relation[ships].” He thinks that building bridges and relationships are “something that we can build together, something [with which] we can inspire each other.”

Flannery (1997) contends that Christians need to “adopt the Jewish agenda” and take a step toward reconciliation (p. 3). Christian leaders, or any leader for that matter involved in conflicted situations, must initiate the process of reconciliation by attempting to span the chasm between them and the person or group(s) with whom they have conflict. Building bridges leads to bridging differences and removing barriers among opposed parties, such as in my case: Jews and Christians.

Karpen (2002) infers a linkage between memory, caring, and restoration. He states that the memory of the Shoah needs to be placed “closer to the heart of Christianity” (p. 205). I may

conclude that the Christian heart should care about Jews impacted by the Shoah and demonstrate their concern concretely in some manner. Also, Karpen (2002) argues that if Christians could understand the Shoah, then they could work together with Jews “on the task of *tikkun olam*, the repair of the world” (p. 206). What is crucial in his statements is the hint that he provides, allowing me to theoretically connect the Shoah to the heart of Christians by bringing Jews and Christians together to repair Jewish cemeteries in Poland. My findings support such a notion.

Clearly, leaders, whether they be religious or not, wishing to deal with conflict, strife, or an injustice in their communities should care and act in such a manner to express their concern. Leaders should have compassion for the needs around them and be concerned about the suffering, oppression and marginalization of people within their communities. Academically, we understand a compassionate response to need as humane orientation. Humane orientation “is the degree to which individuals in organizations or societies encourage and reward individuals for being fair, altruistic, friendly, generous, caring, and kind to others” (Javidan & Dastmalchian, 2009).

Participant-2 illustrates such compassion. She states, “If you care for somebody, you’re going to act. If you love somebody, you’re going to act,” because, as she reasons, a person cannot love another person “from a distance and not have interaction.” In the same way, she asserts, “You can’t care for something, or someone and not have interaction with them.” Peck (2012) hypothesizes that love is more than a feeling or emotion, and he considers that love is “an act of will—namely, both an intention and an action” (p. 83, loc. 1078).

Since relationships are dynamic exchanges among people, they grow and develop over time. Consequently, in building relationships, people may change how they understand and view each other gradually in the context of their interaction. Participant-3 reflects upon the impact of

our relationship on her. Since we first met, she states, “[I have] grown as a person as a result of knowing you, and to me, that’s part of friendships.” She emphasizes how she changed by stating, “You didn’t ask me outright, but the relationship asked me to open my ears differently, open my mind, open my way of seeing things.”

Participant-3’s comments are indicative of the development of trust, along with describing elements of the experience of dialogue and transformational learning. Additionally, her comments point toward the process of reconciliation. Edward Taylor (2007) emphasizes one of the “essential factors” found in a “transformative experience” is based upon building relationships with other people, who trust each other (p. 179); transformational learning is not abstract but a rather concrete and mutual experience. It is through these “trustful relationships” that people can engage in dialogue, discuss and share information freely, which allows them to “achieve mutual consensual understanding” (p. 179).

Remembering and Restoration

Recalling the Shoah, Participant-2 declares, “I think of the wrongness that was done. I think of evil.” Participant-4 remarks, “One of the great tragedies about the Holocaust,” was the instantaneous, almost complete halting of memory, and, “I think that was part of the purpose of what transpired during the Holocaust, to totally erase” the memory of Jews. The Nazis, in essence, were committing both physical and cultural genocide. Participant-3 mirrors this understanding and considers “what the Nazis had done.” She says, “[They were] not just destroying the communities and Jewish life, but they were trying to erase the fact that there was Jewish life by destroying the cemeteries.” Given such injustice, humanity cries out for justice—for the wrong to be made right.

Participant-5 asserts, “To desecrate graves of people, who are no longer there to defend themselves in any way,” is an injustice and “absolutely despicable, the lowest thing you can do.” Participant-5 thinks that the work of TMF creates an opportunity for people to act socially and provides for them “the chance to do something” for the community, which she considers as “doing what is right.” Participant-6 views his motivation to be involved in the work of TMF as “seeking justice for those who can’t seek it for themselves.”

Remembering and caring for Jewish cemeteries may be linked conceptually with restorative actions that not only change the physical state of Jewish cemeteries, but also transform communities, and the interaction of Jews and Christians. In basic terms, restoration is “the act of restoring to a former state or position . . . or to an unimpaired or perfect condition,” while restoring means “to bring back to the original state . . . or to a healthy or vigorous state” (Bradshaw, 1997, p. 8). Herman (2015) asserts that remembering allows for “the restoration of the social order,” and it enables individual victims to experience healing (p. 1).

Karpen (2002), defines reconciliation precisely as meaning “to restore [a relationship] to friendship or harmony” (p. 3). Wilkens and Sanford (2009) consider that redemption contains within it, “the basic idea of restoration” (p. 196). Restoration is not merely about restoring or redeeming physical spaces, or their status within a particular community, but it is more so about restoring and redeeming broken relationships between people.

In particular, Participant-7 affirms that through pursuing justice, Jews and Christians “can come together for an action that expresses both of our faiths.” Consequently, he concludes, “And, that action is to repair these cemeteries that are falling apart, that are neglected, and to do God’s work together in bringing a sense of justice and wholeness and peace to our world.” His

comments reflect the underlying Jewish understanding of restoration, which is encapsulated by *Tikkun Olam*.

In Judaism, the concept of *Tikkun Olam* is a Hebrew term meaning “repair of the world” (Sucharov, 2011, p. 172). *Tikkun Olam* historically has been understood in terms of restoring, restorative works, or healing; nevertheless, in contemporary times, it “has come to connote an ethical outlook by which we strive to create a better world” (Sucharov, 2011, p. 174). Also, such restorative work or repair is viewed as “a process that extends beyond the bounds of the dyadic field to include the surrounding world context” (Sucharov, 2011, p. 175). According to Pinder-Ashenden (2011), “the concept of *Tikkun Olam* surely resonates strongly with devastated souls yearning for healing and redemption” (p. 134). The work of restoration involves repairing the broken world around us. Restoration in and of itself is a process and not a product.

Participant-3 contends that since TMF invests its time, money, and effort “into doing the work . . . it says that you are committed to this healing process.” Moreover, she states, “You’re not just espousing ideas of, ‘Oh, let’s kumbaya,’ and the world is going to get back together again. You’re actually doing something on the ground, which I think is a lot more meaningful.”

The essential aspect of restoration is the linking of Jew and Christian in the physical space of a Jewish cemetery allowing substantial interaction. Participant-8 illustrates the interplay of physical and social restoration, which occurs in a Polish-Jewish cemetery. Participant-8 proclaims, “The mutual hope is that our work brings full healing between Christian and Jew, and on an even more particular plane between Christian Poles and Jews.”

Leaders should understand that the history of their local community is not something static, sitting isolated on an island in the past. Events of the past influence the fabric of society today and will continue to reverberate into the future, unless leaders act to restore the social

order. Memory is not passive. It is active. As leaders remember an injustice, or some social need in their community, they should take steps to speak to whatever the injustice or wrong doing was, and thereby, seek to redeem the situation within their community. Altruism, benevolence, etc. are actions that demonstrate concern and a commitment, along with a willingness to invest time, money, and effort within their community to see the status quo change.

Reconciliation

In simple terms, Jews and Christians experienced reconciliation by working together as they cared for and restored Jewish cemeteries in Poland. Karpen (2002) defines reconciliation as meaning “not only ‘to restore to harmony’ but also, in the mathematical sense, ‘to account for’” (p. 9). Volf (2000) considers reconciliation to have more than a theological meaning, which most Christian theologians understand as the “reconciliation of the individual and God” (p. 162). He maintains that justice should be understood “as a dimension of the pursuit of reconciliation, whose ultimate goal is a community of love” (p. 163). Also, he reasons that reconciliation has a vertical dimension (between God and humanity) and a horizontal dimension (among men and women), and concludes that without this “horizontal dimension reconciliation would simply not exist” (p. 166).

For this case study TMF, I considered that the essential meaning of reconciliation to be reconnecting and bringing together disjointed elements by gathering Jews and Christians collectively to care for and restore Jewish cemeteries in Poland. The data from the study indicates that reconciliation embraces the transformation of perspectives across a broad array of viewpoints amid participants, ranging from religious to secular, from Jew to Christian, from board member to volunteer, and from those with long-term or first-time interaction with the work of TMF.

Learning, according to Kolb (2015), may be defined as “the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience” (p. 49). Taylor (2007) emphasizes one of the “essential factors” found in a “transformative experience” is based upon building relationships with other people, who trust each other (p. 179). By giving Jews “an opportunity” to be a part of Jewish cemetery restoration projects, Participant-3 maintains that TMF provides the Jewish community “a chance to learn the lessons that I did . . . otherwise, they’re not going to get it.” She contends that if Jews “just go to the death camps,” it will only reinforce “our victimization.” Moreover, she continues, “I think that we thrive on the victimization and we’d like to think that we’re always the victims.”

Thus, Participant-3 is convinced that TMF Jewish cemetery restoration projects offer “an opportunity for people [Jews] to grow, change, and rethink their preconceptions about Christians, Poles in Poland.” Concluding, she states, “I suppose, and obviously, if there can be better understanding and a sharing of values and see that there are Christians, who share our values, that [scenario] could have life.”

Participant-2 realizes that from her experiences with TMF and her interaction with Polish and Jewish people, she has developed “new views” and has had “new opportunities” and experiences “to process,” which she otherwise would not have. Furthermore, she affirms, “So, with each experience in life, something is going to change, good or bad, or just everyday experiences change you to some degree.” By having conversations during “the work that we do in Poland,” she says, “[it] will change you, if you let it—and, if you are willing to be immersed in it, and not just be a bystander.”

When TMF engages local Polish communities in its work in a Jewish cemetery, Participant-9 postulates, “It causes the young people to ask questions. It causes the older people

to dig up memories.” He thinks that if local Poles take part physically in restoring a Jewish cemetery it “allows them also to start . . . changing their perception, opening their eyes, their perception of the history, the reality of the place.” In effect, Participant-9 thinks that the work of TMF becomes a type of mediator of change and allows people to consider their viewpoints and change their understanding of the Jewish space in their communities.

Participant-9 theorizes that TMF also functions as a “disinterested third party” in the interaction of the Polish and Jewish communities. Participant-9 links his understanding of how TMF functions to Levinas’ theory of the Third Party. As stated by Corvellec (2005), the third party may be understood as “the other of the other, who stands in front of me” (p. 18). Garcia (2012) states, “it’s wrong to interpret his [Levinas] philosophy as if there are only two people” (para. 7), who are interacting with each other. According to Garcia, Levinas distinguishes “between the closed society of two people,” who stand opposite of each other, “and the open society, who are open to all see” (para. 7). The relationship between two people is not a closed system, but it is open to multiple others, who are viewed as the third party. Corvellec (2005) declares, “The third party disturbs the intimacy of my relationship with the other and provokes me to question my place in the world and my responsibility toward society” (p. 18).

Dialogue

As an American Jew, Participant-3 has experienced the rift between Jews and Christians, as “separateness.” Bridging this gap, or closing the fissure between Jews and Christians, is not easily accomplished; nonetheless, as a group of Christians, who established TMF, we desire to heal the wounds and close the breach through the work of TMF. Therefore, dialogue is a crucial aspect of our work, and one of the primary foci of this study. Do the findings indicate that Jews and Christians are learning to dialogue, or are they even dialoguing at all?

According to Isaacs (1999), dialogue is not a discussion, and it is not centered on “making a decision” by ruling out options that lead to “closure and completion” (p. 45). Isaacs proposes that dialogue seeks to discover new outcomes and possibilities, which provide insight, and a means by which to reorder knowledge, “particularly the taken-for-granted assumptions that people bring to the table” (p. 45). Likewise, Isaacs views dialogue as “a shared inquiry, a way of thinking and reflecting together” (p. 9), and subsequently, he regards dialogue as occurring in terms of a relationship with someone else. He contends that dialogue is not about our “effort to make [that person] understand us;” it is about people coming “to a greater understanding about [themselves] and each other” (p. 9).

What makes dialogue really work? Kessler (2013) indicates that “dialogue begins with the individual, not with the community” (p. 53). Donskis (2013) emphasizes that dialogue requires not only the capacity to hear and listen but a willingness to set aside personal presumptions and “to examine one’s own life” (para. 5). It appears that dialogue is an interchange framed by humility, and not by arrogance, or pride. In dialogue, parties should not seek to “prevail over [their] opponent at whatever cost” (Donskis, 2013, para. 5). Moreover, as Donskis infers, if dialogue is approached in humility, it will “arrest our aggressive and agonistic wish to prevail, and dominate at the expense of someone else’s dignity, not to mention the truth itself” (para. 5).

What is needed in order for genuine dialogue to occur? Theoretically, dialogue should be possible among Jews and Christians as an interchange between people. Dialogue should be probable during the interaction of Jews and Christians while working with each other in caring for Jewish cemeteries in Poland. Therefore, as we have seen thus far in my discussion of the findings, Jews and Christians respond to the work of TMF by forming relationships and caring,

remembering, restoring, and reconciling. Do these responses of Jews and Christians to the work of TMF factor into whether or not dialogue occurs?

The findings from this study indicate that these five core responses of Jews and Christians to the work of TMF facilitate dialogue in at least four ways. First, as discussed previously, developing relationships is a crucial factor in dialogue. Second, loving acts or compassionate acts serve as a means to bridge the chasm between Jew and Christian and allow them to stand together through caring for Jewish cemeteries in Poland. Third, through remembering and restorative acts, or *Tikkun Olam*, Jews and Christians may experience reconciliation by mutually cooperating in caring for and restoring Jewish cemeteries in Poland. Fourth, it is in the context of the Jewish cemeteries of Poland, where relationships are built, compassion is expressed, and remembering, restoring, and reconciling occurs. Jews and Christians find themselves in an emerging space, a third space in which dialogue is possible. Each person, who chooses to enter this unknown territory, must decide what they leave behind, and embrace the discovery of something uniquely new.

Pinto (1996) advances the notion that there is a “Jewish space inside each European nation with a significant history of Jewish life” (p. 6). Ruth Ellen Gruber (2017) reasons that Pintos’s concept delineates “the place occupied by Jews, Jewish culture, and Jewish memory” inside the framework of the European social order, “regardless of the size or activity of the local Jewish population” (loc. 7887). Gruber also considers that such Jewish space may be “‘real imaginary’ spaces: spaces, be they physical and/or within the realm of thought or idea that are, so to speak, both ‘real’ and ‘imaginary’ at the same time” (loc. 7872).

Researchers refer to this so-called “Jewish space” as liminal space, and the concept is denoted as liminality, which was “created by Arnold Van Gennep (1909) and Victor Turner

(1959)” (Auton-Cuff & Gruenhage, 2014, p. 2). Franks and Meteyard (2007) maintain that liminality is “the state of being betwixt and between where the old world has been left behind, but we have not yet arrived at what is to come” (p. 215).

Rohr (2003) posits that the only escape for a person entrapped in “normalcy, the way things are,” is to enter into a “sacred space,” frequently termed *liminality* (from the Latin *limen*) (p. 155). Furthermore, Rohr reasons that in liminal space, it is possible to encounter “all transformation” by moving “out of ‘business as usual’” and leave behind the “old world, . . . but we’re not sure of the new one yet” (p. 155). Thus, liminality allows for Jews and Christians to encounter “a genuine hearing of the Other” (Kessler, 2013, p. 53), move beyond the status quo, and experience the reality of dialogue.

In terms of the work of TMF, what are the essential elements of dialogue? The findings point to seven critical components of dialogue in the context of TMF. These elements are: (a) addressing proselytism, (b) developing common ground, (c) gaining understanding, (d) building a sense of community, (e) speaking about matters of faith, (f) confronting the present past, and (g) overcoming differences. In my discussion, I will briefly consider each of these features.

1. Addressing proselytism – Christians must address proselytism if they wish to pursue dialogue with Jews. Suffice it to say for this discussion that proselytism is a problematic term and is not easily defined. According to Bickley (2015) customarily, “the word . . . meant the attempt to persuade someone to change their religion;” however, he claims contemporary interpretations of the meaning of proselytism have “come to imply improperly forcing, bribing or taking advantage of vulnerabilities in the effort to recruit new religious adherents” (p. 9). Nonetheless, proselytism is not merely the methodology of religious conversion. Broadly

understood, proselytism means persuading people to change their beliefs, viewpoints, or brand loyalties.

2. Finding common ground – Participant-6 alludes to common ground, and finding it is a crucial aspect of dialogue. Participant-2 explains that “the relationships that we [TMF] have are just as important as the work that we do in the cemetery.” Likewise, she clarifies her views about her interactions with Jews in the context of this third space—a Jewish cemetery by describing a discussion that she had on one occasion with Participant-1. She states, “[Our interaction] was because of our relationship through [the work of TMF].” She believes that “there is no other reason on earth that he would have been with us . . . had it not been for [TMF].” In reflecting, she says, “If it had just been [with] my church, or group of my friends from America coming over to work in Poland, there would be no reason for him to be there.”

3. Gaining understanding – Participant-3 is a good example of gaining understanding. She reflects upon how she has gained understanding throughout our dialogue and subsequently, she states, “So, based on our interaction . . . you have helped me understand . . . well, certainly the majority of [Christianity in] this country, or Christianity anyway [as] the basis of this country.” Likewise, she considers that she has learned that we share “more in common than differences.” In conclusion, she states, “I feel like you come from a purity of heart, and that’s what connects with me. So, the cultural differences already there, but what I’ve learned is that the values are the same, and that helps us connect.”

4. Building a sense of community – Not every Jewish cemetery restoration project that TMF facilitates in Poland is the same. Each one is unique. For Markuszów, one of the goals that Participant-8 and I established for the Jewish cemetery restoration project in Markuszów was to bring these two, diverse groups of people together, and from the outset to build a sense of

community. Other than living, eating, and working together throughout a week, which in itself was tough at times and complicated, we added group activities that would bring the group together. For example, we planned excursions for the group, such as being tourists, visiting the concentration and death camp of Majdanek, and daily debriefings following each workday.

5. Speaking about matters of faith – In racial interactions, Singleton and Hays (2008) advise participants engaged in group discussions to “speak [their] truth” and point out that “a courageous conversation requires that participants be honest about their thoughts, feelings, and opinions” (p. 21). Furthermore, the notion of speaking truth intersects well with a Jewish concept termed *Dabru Emet*, which means “speak the truth to one another” (Steinfels, 2000, para. 2).

Tippett (2007) states, “Religion never ceased to matter for most people in most cultures around the world. Only northern Europe and North America became less overtly religious in the course of the twentieth century” (loc. 203). Religion matters and cannot be entirely avoided when people interact. Irrespective of faith, cultural traditions, or lack thereof, matters of belief will express themselves in dialogue across the spectrum of religious groups. Although vitally important, TMF is not seeking to advance inter-faith dialogue; nonetheless, when Christians and Jews interact with each other within the framework of a Jewish cemetery restoration project in Poland, matters of faith arise in their conversations from time to time.

6. Confronting the present past – In caring for and restoring Jewish cemeteries in Poland, the work of TMF hinges upon acting in the present, while responding to the devastating impact of the past tragedies regarding the Shoah. It cannot be assumed that Jewish descendants, local Poles, volunteers, or anyone involved in the work of TMF, does not have personal thoughts and feelings about the tragic events and the aftermath of the Shoah.

7. Overcoming differences – Participant-1 considers what we have accomplished over the past decade in our interaction as Jew and Christian in working together in mass graves and in Jewish cemeteries. He states, “I feel that you are reaching, where not many want to reach. You drilled yourself through a thick wall, and you are on the other side. You are inside of that environment that is traumatic, and this is what I mean by getting deeper [in our relationship].”

Overcoming differences, navigating obstacles, and “drilling through a thick wall” of separateness, is building a bridge to span the breach of separation between Jews and Christians. Moreover, he says, “You need huge persistence and patience because people are different, and sometimes they divide. They try to evaluate, who is better, and who is worse.” He acknowledges that in my work, I have experienced such a pattern “from both sides—Baptist, [and] Jewish.” Still, in spite of these difficulties, Participant-1 says, “You believe in that friendship, you believe we can overcome these walls.”

The Jewish cemetery in Poland is a liminal space, a third space, a nexus that allows Jews and Christians to interact with each other in the concrete act of restoring a Jewish cemetery. The Jewish cemetery is a means to an end. The end that I seek is dialogue and reconciliation. It is essential for leaders to understand that, in what I have discovered, reconciliation is a process and not a product. To reconcile means to bring together and unite fragmented people. Dialogue explores new possibilities and opens pathways that challenge the existing status quo of communities in conflict. Therefore, dialogue and reconciliation may occur within a defined liminal space in which people in conflict may join together in a compassionate and beneficial act for their community.

Leaders should pause and reflect and ask themselves these types of questions: Does my community struggle with a past injustice? How does this injustice influence the interaction of

people within my community? Does conflict surround this situation, or is there community discord or strife as a result of it? What is the space, or pathway, present within the landscape of the community that would allow people to interact, dialogue, and work with each other in a specific way toward the resolving the conflict that will make a difference in their community? Answering such questions will enable leaders to open pathways and work toward dialogue and reconciliation.

Conclusion

The consistency of the data from this case study of TMF and the interaction of Jews and Christians within its framework strongly leads to the conclusion that this study contributes to the larger body of research regarding dialogue. It specifically contributes to Jewish-Christian relations and provides valuable data concerning Jewish-Christian dialogue. Beyond the findings presented in the discussion thus far, several conclusions are indicated.

1. Jews and Christians must address the historical rift that separates them and deal with the effects of the Shoah. Generally, relationships between Jews and Christians are not naturally occurring; therefore, they must be established and built. Thus, someone must become a peacemaker, and reach out to the other, thereby attempting to develop a relationship between them. Relationships are a crucial aspect of genuine dialogue, and the liminal space of the Jewish cemetery in Poland provides validity for Jews and Christians to interact.

Christians must be willing to acknowledge past prejudices and unjust acts. The Christian heart must be concerned or care about how the Shoah impacts Jews today. On the other hand, Jews must be willing to acknowledge Christian efforts to deal with past injustices and thereby close the rift between them. For Christians, working in Jewish cemeteries in Poland with Jews is a way to place the memory of the Shoah closer to their hearts. Likewise, for Jews, restoring a

Polish-Jewish cemetery with Christians would allow them to acknowledge Christian efforts, and will enable them to interact with Christians.

2. The work of TMF creates liminal space in the Polish-Jewish cemetery that establishes a nexus between Jews and Christians. Jews and Christians are transformed through their relationships and their interaction with each other within the framework of the third space, or the liminal space of the Jewish cemetery in Poland. Remembering leads to compassionate or loving acts that seek justice for those who have no voice and cannot “seek it for themselves.” Remembering and caring for Jewish cemeteries may be linked conceptually with restorative actions that not only change the physical state of Jewish cemeteries, but also transform communities, and the interaction of Jews and Christians. Restoring, restorative acts, or *Tikkun Olam*—the repairing of the world is a process, and not a product. The essential aspect of restoration is the linking of Jew and Christian in the physical space of a Jewish cemetery, allowing them to interact substantially with each other.

Dialogue is predicated upon interpersonal relationships between Jews and Christians within the liminal space of the Jewish cemetery in Poland. It is within the context of the Jewish cemeteries of Poland, where relationships are built, compassion is expressed, and remembering, restoring, and reconciling occurs. Jews and Christians find themselves in an emerging space, a third space in which dialogue is possible. Each person, who chooses to enter this unknown territory, must decide what they leave behind, and embrace the discovery of something uniquely new and unexpected.

3. TMF builds relational bridges that lead to bridging differences and removing barriers among Jews and Christians. Loving acts, or compassionate acts, serve as a means to bridge the chasm between Jew and Christian and allows them to stand together through caring for Jewish

cemeteries in Poland. Jews and Christians may experience reconciliation by mutually cooperating in caring for and restoring Jewish cemeteries in Poland. The process of reconciliation embraces the transformation of perspectives across a broad array of viewpoints among Jews, non-Jews, and Christians. TMF functions as a third party, a catalyst, and a mediator, which enables Jews and Christians to interact, facilitating dialogue, healing, and the process of reconciliation.

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