

## Chapter 2

# Coordinating Meaning and Joint Identity: Cultivating Leadership and Cross-Cultural Communication in a Divided Community

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### ABSTRACT

*This chapter is based on an ongoing research of intercultural relationships in a mixed Jewish-Arab town in Israel. The goal of the project is to establish patterns of constructive communication between the two groups, using the methods and models of Coordinated Management of Meaning (CMM) practical theory (Pearce, 1997) to promote the viability and sustainability of the community. Our case-study depicts Jews and Arabs in the human organization called the town of Ramla, where two cultural communities are divided along several reinforcing rifts including ethnic, religious, lingual and cultural (Horowitz & Lissak, 1989). These dissimilar backgrounds generate psychological, emotional and communicational difficulties, which encumber coexistence and impairs prosperity for the town's 62,000 residents. The keys to grapple with such challenges are prudent and inspiring leadership and effective cross-cultural collaboration. These two goals—finding adept leaders and establishing cross-cultural cooperation—are primary in the strategic intervention in the divided society of Ramla.*

### A. THE CHALLENGE OF RAMLA

Ramla is a deeply-divided society in the middle of Israel. The separation between the two communities is perpetuated in every aspect of daily life as Jewish and Arab live in secluded neighborhoods, and their children go to different kindergartens and schools and play in disparate playgrounds. This division is further augmented by fear, suspicion

and mistrust anchored and preserved in a broader context of bitter historical rivalry between Arabs and Jews in Israel/Palestine. The two adjacent communities are locked in an accusative and vilifying discourse of mutual defamation, fueled by negative images, labeling and stereotyping of each other. In such context, the role and responsibility of local community leaders become indispensable. They carry the burden of urging their prospective

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communities to embark on a new path of communication with the Other. "Other" is an exclusion mechanism that delineates the 'us' from the 'them' in order to more effectively consolidate our own identity in contrast to all those who are not us (Rabinowitz, 2001; Hammack, 2006; Bresner, 2010). They must create and cultivate a new social reality in which the other transformed into a partner rather than an enemy to enable a new beginning for their town. The research focuses on a bottom-up endeavor of building a shared identity to Arab and Jewish Ramlians beyond their apparent differences. The gist of this undertaking is to initiate cross-cultural collaboration which traverses labels, generalizations and stigmata and lowers the walls of animosity and rancor.

The chapter depicts the Ramla project and its progress. The Ramla involvement has three basic phases: the first is selecting core groups of community leaders from both nationalities and running constructive communication workshops and training sessions with them. Then in the second phase, these leaders, acting as agents of change, will mobilize and stimulate their respective communities to participate in the workshops. Finally, once acquaintance with the Other, including mutual dignity and empathy and a shared vision for the future, is achieved, Arabs and Jews will jointly initiate and carry out public projects in Ramla as a realization of their newly established relationships and shared identity. The CMM intervention is depicted in detail culminating in preliminary conclusions and prospective suggestions for the expansion of the study.

## **B. LEADERSHIP AS A LEADERS-FOLLOWERS NEXUS**

Several key terms and concepts converge in the Ramla Project: communication, culture, identity, conflict, acculturation and leadership (Peleg, 2010). They are all linked and jointly supply the theoretical backbone for this experiment. Com-

munication is understood in an existential and substantive way rather than instrumental: it is the explaining factor which ties together human behavior. Communication is the opportunity and the path to construct reciprocal reality, shared and mutually accepted by people who decide to live together: a couple, family, tribesmen, a nation, a culture (Pearce & Littlejohn, 1997; Pearce, 2007). Culture is a system which facilitates and promotes communal life and carries the potential of transforming divergence to coexistence. In other words, culture is "the tending of natural growth" (Williams, 1970). This chapter describes an endeavor to promote meaningful change in cross-cultural relationships between Jews and Arabs. Leadership is the decisive factor in the success or failure of change processes. This is valid to all types of human engagement including family, business, politics, education and spiritual (Ahmad, Franciss, & Zairi, 2007; Sommers & Nelson, 2001; Yuki, 2001). The common human default is status-quo; change can be daunting and unnerving. It takes people who deviate from conventionality to harbinger breakthroughs in every field of human progress. Overcoming categorical thinking and vestiges of animosity and hostility should be exercised with prudence and caution by people who can motivate, animate and empower others. In short, reconciliation is best handled by visionary, passionate and responsible leaders. But what is the most effective kind of leadership to be employed in an intercultural conflict, in which two communities share the same sociopolitical space? What is the basis of authority from which leaders of cross-cultural communication spring?

If we go by elimination, Machiavellian realistic authority bases such as cunning, deceit and instilling fear (2004) are not suitable. Max Weber's three sources of power—legal-rational, traditional-emotional, and charismatic (2009)—are equally inappropriate in a context of eliciting voluntary dedication to social and cultural interaction. Charisma, one of the most enigmatic qualities of leadership, is not tantamount to being visionary

or passionate. The origins of charisma are vague, elusive and sometimes dubious and thus, charisma is an effective way to gain leadership but not necessarily to sustain it. One can be charismatic for all the wrong reasons, for example, the right hairdo, the jokes, the affability and other attractive tenets, but to lack the mastery of performance. Passionate and vision are judged by process and result which charisma alone are incapable of providing. Three other faculties of leadership—personal sacrifice; empathy or affability; and the ability to provide hope can partially work since they underline only one side of the leadership equation, the leader's side. This chapter highlights another basis for leadership, perhaps the most significant one—the *nexus between leaders and supporters*. From this perspective, leadership is understood as a two-way street: constituents longing for a leader and leaders yearning for people to lead. Such interdependency is reminiscent of the relationship between authority and legitimacy: they define and confer meaning upon each other, thereby granting saliency to their prospective functions. Thus leadership, like power and identity, is a *socially relevant concept* that flourishes primarily in the context of human community. A socially detached person has scant chances of becoming a leader even if she embodies all the traits and skills for the role. Leadership is predominantly a societal engagement and awareness, cultivated and sustained by the meeting of expectations and interests between agenda-setters and the agenda consumers. People, tribes, groups and nations do not tag along after their leaders merely due to their elocution abilities or wit but because they are eager to realize a dream, to accomplish a plan or to be redeemed from grievance and they trust that their leaders are best suited to expedite the task. Leaders on the other hand, rise up to the occasion because they believe they can deliver on these wishes and hopes. These two complementary orientations are able to promote and gratify each other and this most advantageously occurs when both sides are candidly and thoroughly aware of their

mutual interests and know how to transmit them to their counterparts. This sociological approach to leadership is relatively new. It gained recognition in leadership studies in the late 1970's and the early 1980's, with a shift from unidirectional to interactional and reciprocal concepts, or from the 'great man' approach of Carlisle and Freud to a communicational approach, reviving Kurt Lewin's notion of interdependency between leaders and followers (Brass & Krackhardt, 1999; Carlyle, 2003; Freud, 1939; Hackman & Johnson, 2013; Lewin, Lippit & White, 1939; Northouse, 2013).

Awareness of this type is best attained through constructive communication—flowing, transparent and honest, in which every party keenly endeavors to understand the messages of the other. This is precisely the context for the attentive and considerate leader to thrive, listening and comprehending the needs of those she is serving. Such candid and honest interaction encourages compliance as well, since abiding the leader's instructions is best based on understanding and shared cause rather than fear and imposition. The leaders-followers bond is best served on the emotional level rather than the rational level. Rational-strategic relations are instrumental and mechanic and as such, bear limited capacity to entice adherents to grand assignments or self-sacrifice. The leadership model emphasized here is basically a dialectical story of interaction between leaders and the led. Good, responsible and successful leadership emerges from a flowing, transparent and constructive communication between the two sides. The literature of organizational leadership and social capital leadership is fraught with examples and recommendations for this type of leadership (Bryman, 2013; Gutiérrez, Hilborn & Defeo, 2011; Hitt & Duane, 2002; Mayo, Meindl, & Pastor 2003). In other words, leadership is really a set of relationships between people, and as such it relies on and is expressed by communication. Leadership prospers or fails on the quality of communication between the guides and the guided. The leader is the spark, the constituents are the burning material

and the right circumstance is the oxygen which determines the height and vigor of the flame (Antonkins & House, 2002).

This has also been our criterion of searching and selecting the leaders, both Arabs and Jews, to comprise the core group for the Ramla Project. Bearing in mind that this was a pilot effort that if succeeded, it is aimed to be expanded to other mixed towns in Israel and later, to other countries around the world, the research team that I led needed to maximize our prospects by choosing adept leaders. We also knew that in our three-pronged approach—engaging leaders first, sending them back to their prospective communities to mobilize others, and ultimately engaging the communities at large, the stakes were too high for bad decisions in the selection of leaders. Therefore, we were looking for communicative, approachable and stimulating leaders, with proven record and excellent rapport with their people. More precisely, we were looking for *resonant* leaders. A resonant leader paves the way to a better reality by adhering her vision, creativity and optimism to the expectations, aspirations and hopes of the followers. But in order to do that, a leader must be fully cognizant and mindful of what these needs really are. Some leaders are tempted to create, manipulate or fabricate the needs of their flock in order to better suit them to what they are capable of supplying or to their pre-planned redemption route. Such scheme could be successful for a while until genuine wants and requirements surface from the ground up and force leaders to readjust (McKee, Boyatzis & Johnston 2008). Goleman et al. (2002) believe that the most important tool to identify authentic needs and thus become better leaders is emotional intelligence. This is the seismograph or the sensitivity gadget to understand others' feelings and therefore, a key for responsible and effective leadership. This is the case of leaders-followers communication which relies not on exchange of tangible benefits but on normative values and principles upon which unhindered affinity and loyalty are built.<sup>1</sup>

Resonant leadership is highly relevant in the context of voluntary associations and non-profit organizations that advocate and pursue a social agenda. In social movements, protest groups or even terrorist cells, an inspiring leadership which encourages self-sacrifice and perseverance is crucial. More often than not, these frameworks cannot offer any selective incentives (Olson, 1971) or material stimuli<sup>2</sup>. On the contrary, political activists are more likely to experience disappointment, frustration, imprisonment or death. Motivating followers under such circumstances is substantially facilitated by hooking into their social, cultural and political background. There is a degree of manipulation in attentive and responsive leadership, but not in the deceptive and scheming way, rather the handling and maneuvering fashion of balancing and preserving an ongoing fit between what followers need and what leaders can provide (Goodin, 1980; Ware, 1981; Coons & weber, 2014) This is pure resonant leadership: leaders' decisions find resonance and amplification among followers because those decisions fit their heart's desires<sup>3</sup>. Communication between leaders of social movements and their committed activists is transmitted through special filters or schemata called *framing* (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989; Entman, 1993). Their function is tremendously important: to establish a narrative or an account which serves and promotes the objectives the leaders strive to accomplish. These formulations are geared to shape and validate congruity between the leaders' staging and the followers' reading of the situation and thereby augment the bond between them. Framing is significant in any human organization or grouping since it creates accommodation between supply and demand and synchronization between needs of leaders and led. In the specific case of social movements--absence of immediate tangible inducements--the leaders of protest and social change would fare better in their assignment by deftly adopting their frames to the changing needs of their recruits so that "a certain system of interests, values and beliefs of

the individual and a set of activities, objectives and ideologies of SMO (social movement organizations) will correspond and complement each other“ (Snow & Benford, 1988). This is the tedious but imperative process of *frame alignment* in which power wielders compromise their self-image of omnipotent know-it-all supermen in an effort to act in accordance with the unadulterated claims and volitions of their people. This is communication fine-tuning and concurrence to find the right balance of the leadership equilibrium between authority and consent. Notice however the term social movement *organizations*, which underlines the formal structures, norms and regulations of such movements. In ongoing and protracted struggles, even the most spontaneous and extemporaneous groups acquire features of hierarchy, division of work, and coordination (Cress & Snow, 1996; Lofland 2009; Zald & Ash, 1966;).

### **C. THE RAMLA PROJECT: PREMISES AND PRINCIPLES**

#### **C:1 Why Ramla**

Leadership and cross-cultural collaboration were the two cornerstones of the research project. They emerged from an existing infrastructure of contending cultures and identities in an ongoing collision course of conflict. The interplay among them supplied fascinating opportunities to examine cross-cultural collaboration in a non-formal human organization, which was the group of local leaders and community activists we convened as our research population. The challenge was to transform relationships from hostile and confrontational to mutually beneficial through a change of attitude and image of the Other as a partner rather than an enemy. Collaboration in the attempt to establish mutually beneficial outcomes is the desired mindset and orientation toward such transformation (Gray, 1989; Winslade & Monk 2000). The setting of our endeavor included two contending

cultures, Jewish and Arab, with distinct collective identity, honed and crystallized by an ongoing and intractable conflict. These two disparate identities emanate from incompatible cultures spawning incongruities along religious-secular, Western-Eastern and modern-traditional fault-lines in addition to majority-minority tensions and socioeconomic disparities (Horowitz & Lisak, 2012; Reiter 2009; Yuchtman-Yaar & Shavit 2004). Our task was to manage this conflict in its local Ramlaic manifestation and divert it from its destructive and damaging course by establishing constructive patterns of communication such as Coordinated management of Meaning (CMM) and dynamics of acculturation. The latter is a process which strives for the accommodation of two different cultures through collaborative processes of mutual awareness, recognition and acceptance. In the context of mixed towns in Israel, acculturation is an indispensable basis for the viability of coexistence. We started out with a group of 20 local leaders, ten Arabs and ten Jews. They were introduced to us by several agencies and community centers in Ramla and were picked due to their leadership experience and communal background. My first acquaintance with the town of Ramla and the chief reason for working there rather than in other mixed communities in Israel, occurred in 2006 when I hosted in Israel a delegation of the Realizing the Dream organization headed by their president, Martin Luther King III, the son of the revered Citizens Rights Movement. In the last day of their visit, MLK asked me to show him a place whereby Arabs and Jews live together and peacefully share the same living space. I had a personal friend in the Ramla Municipality and he invited the entire delegation to his town. This is how the initial contact was created.

Ramla is truly a microcosm of the Israeli society. Despite its relatively small population, it is home to several ethnic, religious, lingual and national entities<sup>4</sup>, which endeavor to coexist under a municipality of scant resources and occasionally biased priorities such as refusing to give Arab

names to the streets of the Arab neighborhoods (Greenberg, 2007). This is an ideal location for social research: it is relatively small and hence, tenable, conducive and effective for rigorous investigation, and it boasts all possible cleavages a society could wish or dread: socio-economic, political, cultural and generational. We approached our target population--town leaders and social activists—with hesitancy and uncertainty. We couldn't tell for sure whether we would be welcomed. In spite of our positive and constructive introduction, we still had doubts with regard to how the locals would perceive us as outsiders offering our expertise to improve their lives. After all, what did we know about their concerns, fears, hopes and aspirations? What could we possibly offer Ramlians that would stimulate them to dedicate their precious time to us?

Our focus is on communication--meaningful, constructive and transparent to try and construct a common identity to the Ramla citizens beyond their apparent differences in order to prevent structural dissimilarities from erupting into destructive and debilitating strife. The town of Ramla with its rich historical legacy and ongoing coexistence of Arabs and Jews, Muslims and Christians in the former, Israeli-born, Ethiopian, Russian, Latin-American and Bucharian Jewish immigrants among others in the latter, compose a fascinating multicultural mosaic. As in many other mixed towns, relationships among the various factions are a protracted balancing act between contending priorities, ambitions and concerns. Jews worry that their majority status, as well as the character of the city, will be jeopardized by the superior birth rate of Arabs, while Arabs suspect that the Jewish administration of the city constantly marginalizes them. This sensitive reality is even more delicate and volatile in Israel, where the stability and trust among its Arab and Jewish citizens is daily tested. Ramla, therefore, is a seismograph of the inter-communal fluidity in the country. Composed of 80% Jews and 20% Arabs of whom 16% are Muslims and 4% Christians, the

town consists all the familiar tensions between the two populations along the national, religious and cultural fault-lines. The two groups of population live separate lives: they dwell in distinct neighborhoods (except from few individuals, usually Arabs, who choose to reside in Jewish areas due to the better living conditions), they go to different schools; they participate in dissimilar youth movements, and hang out in disparate locations. They periodically bump into each other in offices, the market place or public places but camaraderie and amity are rare. Ramla is a barometer of the Israeli mood and the ostensible calm might shift in any given moment with any probable Arab-Jewish confrontation not only in Israel but in the entire region. The challenge facing us was how to introduce our influence without antagonizing any of the participants we invited. It looked like a formidable task: how to meet vastly diverged expectations and satisfy all sides.

The objective was not to impose fancy solutions or magical panaceas but to elicit *Ramlians own* stories and *their own* frames of the reality they live in. Our intervention aimed at encouraging the local leaders, composed of Community organizers, young leadership, youth movements' activists, to take control of the rapprochement process, a reciprocal warming-up and reconciliation of differences. This change of attitude would not work as an external dictation or imposition and must be cultivated from within by responsible and prudent leadership. Abundant literature demonstrates this principle to be valid and significant for many diverse human organizations in various sectors (see among others; Austin, 2010; Brown, 1983; Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967) We facilitated the onset by invoking simple questions: "What does it mean to be a Ramlian from your perspective", and "How would you define yourself". These 'simple' questions triggered very complex and multi-layered answers, which reflected the volatile reality our respondents experienced as residents of a mixed town with cross-cutting allegiances, blurred commitments and an ambivalent sense

of belonging. Such discrepancies emanate from incompatible affiliations of state (Israeli), nation (Palestinian), ethnicity (Arab) and religion (Islam). The issue of identity, individual or collective, is pivotal. In the context of socialization, identity strives to align all factions in a community under one banner, one single disposition to which all is loyal and committed. Identity purports to answer the question who I am, who I belong to and who I wish to be like. In other words, identity is the way we associate ourselves with others, a kind of membership card to join the reference group we wish to affiliate with or we were classified to by others. Identity elucidates who we share our destiny with and who we like to develop solidarity and bonding. At the same time, it delineates and distinguishes among dissimilar groupings: while we choose, verify and establish our own, we clearly eschew other identities. This is valid in any sphere of human activity in which an individual becomes a part of society, a member of culture or an employee in a new company. Take for example the case of Jalil, a 26 year old man born and raised in Ramla, whose family has been there for five generations. He is an Arab who does not define himself as such; He is a Christian Orthodox who does not practice religion; He is a Palestinian who does not share Palestinian militancy, and he is an Israeli who is not allowed to serve in the military and is constantly reminded he is not a Jew. When asked how he defines himself, Jalil unequivocally replies "I am from Ramla". But what does it mean? Do other Ramlians feel the same? Can all residents of Ramla be categorized under the same label? Is there a common Ramlian identity? Another member of the young leaders' core group was Hila, a 26 year old Jewish woman, who served in the Israeli army with distinction. She is the exact opposite of Jalil in every aspect but one: she defines herself as a proud Ramlian. Is there anything else common to Jalil and Hila besides sharing the same geographical space? Should there be? Is this foundation sufficient enough to create and cultivate a sustainable community?

This was one of the major impetuses in our Ramla engagement: how to introduce prospects for capacity building and sustainability to a potentially rifted society. Although the initial reaction from town officials when we first approached them was "everything is fine here", repeated visits allowed us to detect potential fissures and concealed discontent. This is our great task for the next trips to Ramla: how to delicately reach those deeper layers of insecurity and frustration through cross-cultural dynamics and constructive communication channels of story-telling, contextualizing and getting to know the other, and then setting the course for the people of Ramla to establish their own common ground. For such task, indicators of measurable impact must be planned; We had three: 1) *Change of Attitude*: Identical questionnaires will be disseminated to Arab and Jewish youth asking them about opinions, attitudes, beliefs and images they hold of each other. A second round of questionnaires will be administered after the constructive communication sessions are held. A significant shift of attitude is expected following the rapprochement process both sides will be experiencing, 2) *Change of identity*: a key question in the survey will ask about identity. It is expected that prior to the intervention, Arabs and Jews will compose their identity from their respective exclusive affiliations. In the end of the project it is expected that their shared identity as Ramlians will become more salient than before. 3) *Change of Behavior*: the Arab and Jewish participants conjointly, as Ramlians, will carry out public assignments in their town, such as excavations (Ramla is world-famous in its archeological sites), communal gardening, neighborhood rehabilitation, and tutoring. Such activities were habitually done separately and their successful execution in both the Arab and Jewish parts of Ramla, will be a strong indication that the communication intervention has had an impact.

## C:2 The Communication Perspective

Communication can also be perceived as the capacity or the possibility of turning variance into coexistence (Peleg, 2010). But how could this utopian task be achieved in a volatile and capricious reality in which every individual, family, group, culture, nation, or civilization competes for breathing space by stressing their uniqueness and exclusivity? Is harmonious coexistence based on dignity and tolerance a viable option in a region laden with power relations, coercion, and violence such as the Middle East?

In an attempt to comprehend how such constructive and beneficial communication works, and what it is capable of doing, it is worthwhile to adopt the *communication perspective* which duly redirects the attention from communication as means to communication as substance (Pearce, 1989). To put it differently, conversation and dialogue are not merely channels to send messages, and they are not only the medium to enable meaning and understanding; they *are* the content and substance of the interaction. Such logic depicts communication as the essence and guiding principle of community building. The emphasis is laid on the character and pace communication forms, the trust and mutual respect it promotes and the acquaintance and familiarity it cultivates between the various members of the burgeoning human gathering. To succeed in these intrepid undertakings, two important faculties are required: *coordination* and *meaning* (Pearce & Littlejohn 1997; Pearce, 2007; Creede, Fisher-Yoshida & Gallegos 2012). Coordination is highly useful for a meaningful discussion because it steers discussants toward each other and renders their interaction more valuable, collaborative and effective. Coordination takes place *while* communication occurs and not subsequently and it thrives precisely because it is carried out *during* and not after discourse. It is dialogue itself which enables the understanding and the openness toward the other and it is dialogue which permits the identification of critical

moments where judgment of what to say next is employed to produce a more attentive and more meaningful exchange. Each conversation with its explicit timing and distinctive circumstances, binds its participants in a shared experience in which a specific universe is formed and exclusive norms and values are created. The fault-lines of this universe are gradually woven by utterances and counter utterances bouncing off each other as the conversation progresses.

Such understanding of coordination requires a high degree of ingenuity. It cultivates a spirit of creativity to invent and design relations while communicating, and thus, invokes adaptability, flexibility and tolerance for the relationship to survive unexpected shifts. This is where the *social construction model of communication* becomes handy (Burr, 2003; Gergen & Gergen, 2003). In this model communication creates an opportunity or space for speakers to interact. They nurture and inspire each other to share an affluence of diverse assertions, perceptions, convictions and images, which together compose a universe. Unlike the 'objective' reality which is supposedly just hanging out there, dialogue constructs subjective reality, which is contingent upon the vocabulary, the opulence of imagery and the variance of topics. In this fashion, the participants or the contributors to the discussion assign over *meaning* to each other's existence. Interpretations and explanations to the world around them are culled from what they hear and understand from others.

This is what we sought to establish between Arabs and Jews in Ramla: to motivate the young leaders to freely deliberate and create a new social environment through conversation unfettered by preconceived notions and prejudgment. This was no easy task by any means because free-flowing and constructive communication between the participants was encumbered by cultural differences that for years were exacerbated and inflamed by reciprocal negative images and associations. The initial attitude was suspicion and cynicism ("this won't lead to anything meaningful", "they will



not be truthful”), and participants refrained from addressing one another in name. Arabs and Jews sat separately lumped in their original reference groups. There was no coordination and no conjoint meaning generated in these early discussions. CMM was urgently needed to be introduced as theory with guiding principles, and later, as a practice method and as an alternative way to run a conversation. CMM was the central stimulus that set the entire acculturation process in motion (Pearce & Pearce, 2000).

The challenge was to change the rules of social behavior by practicing new patterns of communication between Arabs and Jews during a designated series of dialogical episodes. The aim was to establish a co-constructed process of communication in which new meaning is conjointly created by the participants. As a result of configuring their communication design, the Arabs and Jews of Ramla were expected to alter their mutual negative images, labeling and prejudice to be able to conjointly erect a new social world around them. For the long run, these upgraded channels of communication generate new social environments, which if sustained and expanded, replace deep-rooted animosity and mistrust. Our methods of bringing about such changes included: *Story-Telling*, *Contextualization*, *Reversed Role Simulations* and *Coordination*.

These activities intended to be held indoors in a theoretical learning environment. They were planned to be followed in service and community-building activities outdoors. Undertakings such as gardening, fencing, social and cultural activities with children, youth and senior citizens and excavations in archeological sites are to be pursued together by Jews and Arabs as Ramlians. Such intervention, we surmised, will enable Arabs and Jews for the first time to experience a candid, transparent and poignant dialogue. The project was geared at empowering Arabs and Jews by changing discursive habits and communication patterns through dialogue strewn with various joint trust-building events such as focus groups, town hall

meetings, study circles and public deliberations. This project was designed as a pilot endeavor to be followed by future rounds of accommodation. The main transformative tool, as already mentioned, is a training workshop in which Arabs and Jews participate together in acquiring CMM skills to enable them to create cross-cultural collaboration for a better common future.

### **C:3 The CMM Workshop**

CMM is a practical theory composed of techniques and models, in which a new social reality is co-constructed and improved relationships are established through applications and dynamics of constructive communication. To exercise a more open and flowing interaction between Arab and Jews, we employed CMM techniques. The need for transparency and honesty emerges from the severe lack of confidence and mistrust of the Other. Our first challenge was to dispel this psychological obstacle by getting to know the Other beyond simplistic generalizations and stereotyping. This is the potency of the CMM techniques that we used: a) *Story-Telling*: Listening to each other's narratives and be attentive to the “how” and the “why” rather than the “what”, in order to eliminate preconceived notions and prejudice; b) *Contextualization*: Broaden the context of the Other's narrative to include more nuances and richer meaning; c) *Reversed Role Simulations*: participants of each faction are assigned the role of their counterparts and enact typical scenes from Ramla as felt by ‘the other’. This exercise enhances the Ramla experience and promotes empathy and solidarity; d) *Coordination*: Once more openness and recognition of the Other are achieved, co-constructing the common social reality and shared vision of the future can be established.

Alongside the CMM techniques, CMM models were utilized to advance discussions and demonstrate in real time how patterns of communication change attitudes and opinions to create a new social reality. The models we applied were: a) *The Daisy*

*Model*, which shows the many concurrent influences on what we say in a conversation; b) The Storytelling (LUUUUTT) Model that underscores the array of meanings, given or hidden, behind and around every utterance and each entry of the discussion; and c) The *Serpentine Model*, which highlights the reciprocal effect of the participants and the context of the situation on what is being said. All these models aim to clarify and facilitate a conversation to yield the best productive results on the road to a trustworthy and stable social context.

In summation, the *ultimate goal* of the project is to enable Ramlian Arabs and Jews a candid, transparent and poignant dialogue. The project will empower young people of both camps by changing discursive habits and communication patterns through attentive dialogue, contextual reconstruction and reframing separate identities as common. In a joint action of a rhetorical-responsive nature, the process is not one of convincing or influencing, but one of inclusivity and fairness, whereby both parties compose together a congenial environment unfamiliar to neither of them prior to their engagement. A successful completion of this effort will result in an enhanced commitment to civil society and social inclusion, or more specifically, to the town of Ramla.

## D. PROCESS

### D:1 The Questionnaires

The engagement in Ramla began with an expeditionary visit to the town in December 2011. In that visit, acquaintance meetings were held with the municipality's representatives headed by the town's Mayor. In these initial encounters, the project's goals were discussed and a green light was given by the authorities of the host town to start in the following visit. Since then, the research team has had eight visits to Ramla with regular intervals of a month and a half on average. The next stage was to select our core group of 20

community activists and young leadership, ten of each denomination. A network of voluntary and nonprofit organizations was introduced to us and prospective leaders of each agency were recommended based on their longevity and perseverance in the field, their reputation as community 'movers-and-shakers' and record of accomplishments. They were interviewed preliminary interviews about their desire and commitment to participate in such a project and their feeling about being a part of a bi-national experiment.

Before the interactive process began, we asked the participants to fill out questionnaires. We wanted to get an initial reaction, a baseline attitude of Arabs and Jews toward each other, in order to be able to detect progress or change in a follow-up questionnaire after our intervention. Here is a sample of the questions we thought would be relevant to extract data about how people think about the Other:

1. How do you define yourself? (nationally, religiously, culturally, locally, or other);
2. On a scale of 1 to 5 (with 1 being the least), to what degree are you familiar with the Other's culture, history and/or religion?;
3. What is your view about Arab/Jewish relations in Ramla (open-ended question);
4. Would you say that Arab-Jewish relations in Ramla are: a) Excellent b) good c) average d) bad e) unbearable
5. What do you think are the main reasons for the quality of these relationships? (open-ended question).
6. What do you think is the future direction of Arab-Jewish relations in Ramla? a) They will improve b) they will remain the same c) they will deteriorate.

A set of specific questions was added as well: 1. Would you consider going out with a boy/girl of the Other denomination? y/n/don't know; 2. Have you ever invited/hosted or was invited/ hosted by someone from the Other reference group?; 3. Have you ever read a scripture of the other religion or a history book of the other nationality?; 4. Were you exposed to prejudice/labeling/generalizing/stigmatization of the Other, and if so, how and to what extent?; 5. How do you see the town of

Ramla in 10 years? a) Harmoniously Integrated  
b) Practically Integrated b) Divided but peaceful  
c) Deeply-divided and violent.

The results were neither encouraging nor surprising. We anticipated distance and suspicion but not to that extent. Most respondents were ignorant about the Other's world. To the larger extent, they were oblivious to their counterparts' concerns, fears and ambitions. Most of them never hosted or were hosted by a member of the opposite reference group (except two Jews and one Arab who visited the homes of the Other; one of the Jews even spent the night). No-one read the Other's scriptures and they only had a limited and selective exposure to history textbooks of the alternative school system. Almost everyone admitted familiarity with prejudice and stereotyping of the Other, as well as feeling it against them. Nobody had friends of the opposite camp let alone going out or becoming romantically involved. Arabs and Jews split on the reasons for this predicament. The former were united behind their conviction that Jews patronize or don't respect them while the Jewish participants to various degrees believed that Arabs hated Jews and constantly sought to eliminate them. They were less divided on the present and future of their town: 70% thought that relations between Jews and Arabs fall between average and bad; 45% feared relations will deteriorate, and 30% envisioned a deeply-divided and violent Ramla in 10 years. The somber mood the answers reflected was not held by derelicts or outcasts but by educated, intellectual and politically active young leaders who composed our core group. This was the atmosphere we set out to change.

The next step was to get the core group together. The first two rounds in February and April 2012 were introductory: the participants got to know each other, their ethnic and cultural backgrounds, their roles in their respective organizations, and their expectations from these meetings. The research team, in their roles as moderators, presented its vision and prospective goals: to offer new patterns of communication between the participants,

perceived to be representatives and delegates of various factions in the Ramla society. Our intention was to consider these delegates as agents of change, who would spread the word and their newly acquired skills among their colleagues. For most of the participants it was the first opportunity to get to know their fellow Ramlians from up close. Our core group had a wide representation of the town's population: women and men, young and older, religious and secular, Jews and Arabs, and within each ethnic camp different denominations such as Christians and Muslims in the former, Ethiopians, Latin Americans, Moroccans, Bucharrians and Sabras in the latter.

The first round of introduction touched upon the collective and individual aspects of the Ramla affiliation. Most people were born and raised in the town, the minority have moved in later in life and found a new home and others were only working there but developed a sense of belonging and care for the place nevertheless. In our second visit in April, we brought a documentary film crew with us. We planned to have a film documenting our effort, especially tracking down the change in people's attitude and behavior following the patterns of communication we introduce. The second round was fascinating particularly because participants began to gradually open up. Feeling more comfortable and secured in our presence and in each other's, some of the representatives began to raise more personal and emotional perspectives. This gradual shift has rendered the conversation more profound and more complicated as people became less formal and ceremonial and more candid. This transition has exposed some private and shared concerns among the participants. Some talked about identity, other about sense of purpose and belonging, and others about images and prejudice. One common theme that kept resurfacing was the negative reputation of Ramla and its people have in the eyes of outsiders. All participants were equally adamant about the necessity to improve the town's image. Discussion at this stage was semi-constructed and it revolved mainly around

impressions, gut-feelings and associations. This allowed for several revelation and confessions of people's mutual emotions about each other's group affiliation, labeling and categorical references.

In the next round in June, we advanced a notch. If the first two rounds were deliberately semi-constructed ice-breakers in order to form a group and to raise interest and curiosity among our activists, we felt that the third round should be structured and controlled and that it was time to start administrating our method—CMM (Coordinated Management of Meaning) to the members of our core group. We kept having a loyal core of several individuals who kept coming but there was quite high turnover of people dropping out, mainly due to pressures from their prospective communities, and for a few, loss of faith in the process, and newcomers filling their vacancies. In the next two rounds of June and August, we started in a methodological and systematic manner to discuss CMM methods with the group. But this was not a regular and simple study-group and our intention was not merely to teach. The emphasis from the beginning was on practice and training rather than theories and models. Every new term and concept we presented was immediately put within the relevant context of people's areas of expertise and engagement. Better communication was exercised and simulated in service, education, voluntary organizations, family life and other social exchanges. The cultural variety among the participants helped us reach colorful and highly intriguing conversations throughout the sessions.

In order to make the engagement more consistent and the communication more fluent, we added two important contribution to our effort at this point: 1) a coordinator who would be in charge of recruiting and updating participants as well as logistics such as rooms, equipment and schedule. 2) Simultaneous translation, mainly from Hebrew to English for the American moderators to fully understand every expression of the discussions and vice versa. These factors, which came into full effect during the October and December

rounds, consolidated the relationships among the core of regular participants and facilitated the conversation, which advanced more smoothly. We continued with the CMM principles which were occasionally accompanied by home assignments, but due to the ever-changing and dynamic sociopolitical context in Israel, the discussions were constantly peppered with current events and relevant references to outside developments. Gradually we notice that the participants gain more and more command of the practical aspects of what we discuss and some of them admitted that they had used it at work and realized the advantage they could draw out of it.

## D:2 Working with the CMM Techniques and Models

The CMM models and techniques are supposed to augment and expedite the acculturation process, which is, at the same time, the context and the corollary of the CMM intervention. The techniques correspond with the models in the following manner: story-telling is the essence of the Daisy Model and the LUUUUTT Model, Contextualization and Reversed Role Simulations appear in all three models, and coordination is the crux of the Serpentine Model. The CMM workshop started with the introduction of the Daisy Model. This is an analytical tool that call attention to the multiple layers of meaning from which intention emerge. A single expression or statement, in the center of a daisy can emerge from so many different, even conflicting, sources, or petals, if we stay consistent with the daisy metaphor. In order to more effectively comprehend the messages of our partners and to maximize our attention to what is being said and meant, we must be cognizant and mindful of all the potential origins that feed the final saying we encounter to the same extent that the other side takes heed of the various bases that cultivate our message. Once we are aware of these disparate bases and the compound nature of the Other's stands, we become more tolerant and

more appreciative of that statement. The disagreement, although still genuine and sincere, might be moving in a more constructive and positive path now that each side is more knowledgeable of the Other's keen interests and desires.

In our Ramla experience, the expressive statement the core group members were given to grapple with was "I am a Ramlian". We divided the core group to four smaller teams mixing Jews and Arabs, and each group received individual pads and one big collective sheet of paper with the daisy drawing and the clear statement in the middle of the flower: "I am a Ramlian". Their assignment was to individually compose the different components of their Ramlian identity and then collectively, to fill in the blank petals in the team's sheet with their respective observations. This way they had to undergo a process of adjusting to each other's statements and trying to piece them together into one single flower. This was clearly an identity issue of who I am and what is the meaning of declaring that one was a Ramlian: do Arabs and Jews mean the same thing when they utter an identical proclamation of identity? Surely they do not. The petals of the daisy reveal how dissimilar the foundations of that opening assertion were. The red claims were made by the Jewish participants whereas the blue ones represent the Arabs. Each side backed the initial statement of being a Ramlian by declaring their national affiliation "I am Jewish" and "I am a Palestinian\*5". Another gap is discerned with regard to the nature of the town. While Jews believe Ramla is a model mixed town and economic opportunities abound, the Arabs maintain that Ramla is all but a model town and that they are treated as second class citizens deprived of economic opportunities.

Three positions are similarly stated but they emanate from opposing directions. The first, "we were here first" is claimed by both sides and this is basically the gist of the Arab-Israeli conflict. The Jews invoke Biblical times and God's promise to Abraham while Arabs rely on lineage and generations upon generations of living in and

of that land. Similarly, both sides are weary of Ramla's bad reputation in the eyes of outsiders and of the fact that young people prefer leaving the place. However, the reason for the bad name is conflicting: Jews attribute it to the fact that Arabs live in Ramla and this scares away new residents and scares out Jews who were born there. Arabs are sure that the negative image is due to the intolerant attitude and discrimination against them, which causes young Arabs to shy away of the town. Lastly, there is the key year of 1948 and the war of that spring. This is a critical factor in the identity formation of all Jewish and Arab members of the core group, albeit with utterly different connotations and associations. Jews admire 1948 as the year of liberation and they term it the War of Independent. Arabs see it as Al-Nakba, Arabic for the catastrophe, and the year that started the predicament of the Palestinian refugees, the calamity and the occupation of their land by the Zionist invaders. Here is a graphic illustration of the Daisy Model in the context of Ramla (figure no. 1):

While expressing their positions on the various topics on the petals, participants had an opportunity to explore the broader context of opposite stories. This gave coherence and logic to contrary views and perceptions that were previously met with unqualified disbelief and disdain. This trend was amplified by reversed role simulations, in which Jews and Arabs presented each other's narratives and experiencing in a more profound and emotional way where the Other was coming from.

The next day we introduced the story-telling model of CMM. Similarly to the Daisy Model, the purpose here was to exemplify the manifold nature of positions and expressions so that each side would be more considerate and more patient of the other's attempts to present an argument. Taking things for granted, generalizing, or categorizing encourage simplification, superficiality and debilitating communication. This, in turn, jeopardizes cross-cultural understanding and reconciliation. The storytelling model or the LUUUUTT model

Figure 1. The Daisy Model



(stories Lived, Unheard stories, Untellable stories, Unknown stories, Untold stories, Told stories and story Telling), details the wide array of versions, manifest and hidden, that vie and ultimately shape the final story we tell or hear from the other side. Storytelling is the narrative or the account of things as perceived by each actor. Listening to others, particularly adversaries or enemies we don't agree with, is a definitive experience of humility and sharing. Every party foregoes the reassuring feeling that they have the sole possession of 'the truth' and lending itself to hear other versions of that truth, as credible as their own. This often is a painful realization with long-range benefits of compassion and appeasement. This was the objective in the Ramla Project as well.

Jewish and Arab members of the leadership group were asked to tell their story, their own private biography or timeline as Israelis and as Ramlians. The first versions were restrained, formal and familiar. The told stories repeated the familiar representation of Ramla as a successful experiment of Arabs and Jews sharing a common living space. Then, some participants, mostly Arabs, ventured into 'real-life' stories, and mentioned

episodes they live and witness daily. These did not match the formal story. The image that began to emerge was of populations living together but separately: they all live in Ramla but in different neighborhoods, they go to different schools, play in different playgrounds, and go to different youth movements. This discrepancy between stories told and lived surfaced concealed accounts of living in Ramla: unheard stories of Arabs and Jews that do live together in certain houses (rundown buildings in which poor Arabs and Jews, mostly new immigrants from Third World Countries, share). Another story in that category is Christian Arabs who prefer studying in Jewish schools, where they are frequently marginalized, than to go to Arab schools, which are predominantly Muslims.

Unknown stories include previous generations' legacies and motivations to the current strife: were they indigenous? Were they foreigners? What were their stands and attitudes toward the Other? Are today's protagonists offsprings of ancient combatants or peacemakers? Untold stories or untouched controversies are usually various peaks of the Arab-Israeli conflict. These are disagreements that are best not mentioned among Ramlians if they

covet tranquility. Predominant in this category is the 1948 war. Jews unalterably call it the War of Independence while Arabs insist on terming it Al Nakba. Each side adheres to these labels as part of their collective identity. In Ramla, as in other mixed town, this is a moot point, a huge elephant in a tiny room. Conceptually close are the untellable accounts, the taboos. They consist of undercurrents of racism, discrimination, bigotry and intolerance. Rumors about mixed marriages, the ultimate taboo, resurfaced less frequently. Taken together, these various renditions of stories exhibit the mosaic of layers upon which a conversation is built and consolidated. Recognizing and admitting the multitude of stories, the richness of substructure that nurtures the very essence of conversation, award consideration, sensitivity and humanity to the story-tellers. This storytelling endeavor creates a mindset of openness, lenience and acceptance that is capable of bridging the most daunting cultural misunderstandings. Here as well, the atmosphere is conducive to contextualization and reverse role playing. With every rendition of Arab or Jewish narrative, the participants take turns in telling the other side's accounts. In the process they enquire about details and particulars, thereby delving into the deeper origins of their rivals' motivation and impetus. Figure 2 depicts the Storytelling Model and its various options:

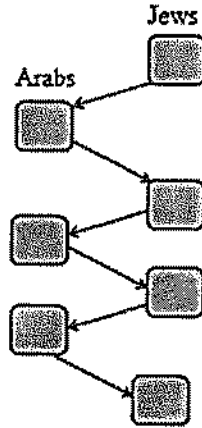
On the third day, the Serpentine model of CMM was introduced. The basic idea here is that in each ~~turn~~, speakers are influenced by what their partner ~~had said~~ before. Every statement is predicated upon what has been stated in the previous sentence. This is how a new understanding or a new social situation is constructed through communication. While people converse, they adjust themselves to one another in real time. They relate their responses to concrete observations of their partner and they constantly change and adapt their perspective according to what they heard. Such pattern of communication requires attentiveness and active listening from all participants lest they won't be able to contribute and enrich the discussion. The serpentine model, evoking a serpentine move from side-to-side, back and forth between elocutionists, is a good depiction of this type of exchange. The discussants are empowered by one another; they are vested in each other and they gradually attenuate the gap between their dissimilar accounts to co-construct a joint story. It is a learning experience that does not take place instantly. The wider the breach between the speakers, the more it takes to bridge it. In the Ramla project, we paired up Arabs and Jews and let them conduct their own dialogue before showing them the Serpentine Model. They were only instructed to pay full attention to what the other was saying. The serpentine dynamics

Figure 2. The Storytelling Model



Figure 3. The Serpentine Model

Reflects the flow of a conversation, and how each utterance is predicated on the previous one and impacts the next one



started to gradually kick in and conversants began to pick up on what their counterpart had said as a launching pad for their turn. It took several trials and repeating runs to start detecting patterns of conciliation, 'softer' versions of expressions and compromises on previously steadfast claims. This type of conversation, whereby each partner nurtures and inspires the other, eliminates rigid prearranged speeches or scolding monologues. It transforms unilateral preaching to an interchange of thoughts and concerns that sets an approachable tone. At one point, after a long and at times tedious discussion between Jihan, an Arab youth leader and Gabi, a Jewish community organizer, the latter turned to some of his fellow Jewish participants and cried "folks, we should really understand how they feel when we celebrate Independence Day". The Serpentine Model is the typical example of how coordination begins: elocutionists start conversing from remote points of departure and gradually they abridge their distance by carefully listening to each other and reshape their entries to the conversation according to what the other had said. This mutual accommodation leads to trust-building, and next, co-construction of social

reality and shared vision become possible (Pearce & Pearce, 2000; Spano, 2001). The Serpentine Model is depicted in Figure 3:

## E. WHAT'S NEXT

The project has concluded the first stage. The core group of 20 leaders, trained and counseled on CMM methods, is ready to be dispatched to their prospective communities and start mobilizing more participants to engage in constructive communication with their Ramla neighbors. There is one last activity to complete: to test how the rapprochement achieved indoors will be played out outside, in the 'real world'. The joint activities planned for Ramlian Jews and Arabs for the benefit of their town should be first tried by their representatives at the core group. This is what we set to do in our upcoming visits to Ramla. Our concern is whether the bond we established among the pioneers would hold in the hiatus between our visits. The community organizers and leaders return to their families and immediate vicinities, where they are exposed to the daily vagaries and



vicissitudes of the Israeli precarious reality. The empathy and understanding our participants assiduously formed can evaporate in the haze of hostility augmented by occasional flares of the regional conflict. Our shimmering hope relies on the dynamics of amicability we saw nourishing in front of our eyes, and the leadership quality of our core group: consistency, courage, optimism and belief in the ability of people to change their own destiny.

We had another reason to be hopeful, a concrete reason. We ran the second questionnaire in our last day in Ramla, the “after” version. The questions were similar to the first trial, but not the answers. Since the project started, two Arab participants were invited for dinner at the homes of Jewish participants, and one Jewish was hosted by an Arab family. Most of the group members had at least a cursory reading of the Other’s scriptures and history textbooks; There were friendships (and one budding romantic relationship) starting to form among representatives of the two camps. There was a general spirit of reconciliation and understanding that things could and should improve: only 30% (as opposed to 70% in the ‘before’ run) thought that relations between Jews and Arabs stand between average and bad; 35% (as opposed to 45%) feared relations will worsen, and only 15%, half of the earlier responses, envisioned a deeply-divided and violent Ramla in 10 years. From the three paths we constituted to measure impact, the first one, a change of attitude, was certainly bearing fruit. The second one—a change of identity, from separate, antagonistic and confrontational to collaborative and shared—is still to be obtained, whereas a change of behavior will be our ultimate goal as we venture taking the young leaders outside, to the public spaces and venues of Ramla.

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