

The Story of Practice

A radical Muslim activist from the United Kingdom, organizer of anti-Israel demonstrations and Relief for Gaza convoys, calls home in dismay when she finds herself participating in a program with Zionists—and then sums it up after two weeks saying, “I learned I could be friends with people I hate.”

HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE PROGRAM

The key to the CEDAR approach is the requirement that participants, known as fellows, confront one another’s differences—and then learn how to live with them anyway. In two intensive weeks of combined lectures, site visits, and hands-on learning, these fellows experience unfamiliar religious customs, grapple with beliefs that contradict their own, reexamine lifelong assumptions, and figure out how to share time and space.

CEDAR programs create new social and interpersonal spaces, broadening the range of possibilities to present a new way of “living together differently.” They don’t seek to build a new community in which everyone agrees and shares the same assumptions, but rather to teach people how to live with their different understandings of home, life, faith, worlds of meaning, and belonging. In short, they model the reality of how to live in our existing communities with people who are not like us—whether these differences are religious, national, tribal, linguistic, or sexual.

CEDAR was conceived of during a multireligious discussion around a restaurant table in the central market of Sarajevo in December 2001. There, against a background of wartime destruction, a conversation among a group of Jews, Muslims, and Christians sparked the idea for an experimental program using religion as a tool for understanding, not as a weapon for

intolerance. In 2003 CEDAR launched its first two-week program in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia as the International Summer School on Religion and Public Life, creating a unique model for people with divergent religious identities to live with, recognize, and learn about “the other” together. Since then, the school has been held in a different country or countries each year, meeting in over a dozen locations on four continents. During its first decade of operation, it attracted more than four hundred fellows from fifty countries and a variety of backgrounds.

In 2013 the school changed its name to CEDAR and transformed itself as an organization. Instead of running one school a year, under the direction of an international team and local hosts, CEDAR is now an international network of programs—in Africa, the Balkans, and North America.¹ The different programs that we have run over the last fourteen years have taught all involved a good deal about difference and how to get people to live with difference—not just with the cognitive dissonance it produces but also with the challenges to building trusting relations across different communities of belonging that result. We learned early that while religion may be a prime marker of difference, it is far from the only one. As we expanded our programs beyond the first schools in Bosnia, Croatia, and Israel, we gradually realized that the issues we were addressing were not limited to differences between religions, or even to those between religious and secular individuals. We came to recognize as well the importance of ethnic and tribal identities, and of sexual orientation, as sites of conflict, intolerance, and distrust among many people. Consequently, we integrated these themes into our programming.

We learned too that shared experience, as opposed to academic learning, is critical to providing a safe space in which people can explore their differences, even in the face of challenges to their own taken-for-granted categories and expectations. Shared experiences provide the frame within which fellows process and make sense of intellectual analysis. In addition, we came to realize just how important the group itself was to the work we wished to accomplish. In the first years of programming, we believed that the “other” whom the fellows would encounter, interact with, and come to understand was someone in the selected environment: Palestinian refugee camps, gay and lesbian churches, Alevi communities in Istanbul, Pomak villages in

Bulgaria, and so on. What we discovered, however, was that these site visits and meetings were really just the backdrop for the real encounter—of the fellows with one another. We realized then how critical it was to bring together fellows from all over the world with as much diversity as possible in race, nation, ethnicity, religion, age, gender, sexual orientation, profession, and so on. The “other,” we came to recognize, was not outside the group, but inside—and it was in that internal encounter, and the act of building a group despite these multiple differences, that the key learning took place.

With time, we came to appreciate the importance of “reflective practice” in a program such as ours, and we decided to have an internal evaluator function as a resident anthropologist in every program. In dealing with the myriad problems that arise in a program that necessarily makes the details of so many private lives issues of public concern—matters of halal and kosher food, of prayer time for those so obligated, of restricted travel on holy days, and so on—the “executive” branch has little opportunity on the ground to reflect on its concrete decisions and their implications. To learn what works and what does not—indeed, just to keep one’s finger on the pulse of the program as it develops during those intense two weeks—it is critical to have someone present whose only job is to observe, question, and record the significant events of the day. Hard data are much more reliable than anecdotal recollections in answering questions such as the following: Did people of different communities eat together, or did they stay with their own countrymen? How did most of the fellows react to the challenging meeting with the gay and lesbian community in the Birmingham church? Did certain groups feel excluded from one or another activity—or, alternatively, coerced into participating in one? As an evaluating tool, this reflective practice helps us assess the learning outcomes. Every year the internal evaluator produces a long, detailed report that enables staff and organizers to learn from their mistakes, as well as showing the staff how fellows responded to the programming. Each year this process allows staff to create and integrate new aspects into the programming after they reflect on the data collected. We discuss the importance and insights of such a reflective practice much more in chapters 3 and 4.

Finally, we discovered—often the hard way—that the group needed to be by itself at times, to form itself sometimes in opposition to staff and organizers, and to have time and space to construct its own intimate spaces

of trust and shared difference. So we encouraged the development of small facilitation groups of five or six fellows, without staff supervision, as a vehicle for trust building and shared experience. The challenge that fellows then immediately faced was mediating between their membership in these small groups and that of the whole group of thirty fellows. It took a good deal of time to comprehend these processes and to recognize their importance.

After over a decade of trial and error—holding daily staff meetings during the schools, debriefing following them, and poring over evaluation reports—we have produced a body of knowledge and a methodology, as well as a comprehensive pedagogy that is universally applicable and which those trained in it can adopt to operate their own programs. It is this pedagogy that we present here.

THE LEARNING PROCESS

On Tuesday, July 12, 2005, the tenth day of the two-week program, we boarded our bus just after breakfast to visit the Palestinian village of Anata. It's only four miles from the center of Jerusalem to Anata, but as the bus slowly moved through traffic toward the West Bank, the transition was palpable. Soon enough the main road became a smaller street, and the architecture changed from apartment buildings to one-story houses. We found ourselves in a small town set on a winding road on an arid-looking hill, trying to find the house of the mother of the Palestinian Authority's deputy chief of security, whom we were scheduled to meet. As our bus driver navigated the narrow street, we looked at the small stores whose merchandise overflowed onto the street. The houses in Anata were large, multifamily structures that opened onto the street through long, glassed-in verandas. Wasserfall took note of the blues and the greens of the verandas interspersed with the white of the stones and the strong light of this dry, Middle Eastern day. As we finally arrived at the house and climbed the few steps to the veranda, we were welcomed by a ten-year-old, who fetched drinks for the group. Nobody else was there, and the house felt eerily empty. We finally learned that the deputy chief had been dragged from his car and beaten senseless by Hamas activists while en route to meet us. The initial response of the Israeli Jews in our group to his nonappearance was, in essence, that once again there was "no one to speak to," that Palestinians "are not inter-

ested in meeting; they are ignoring us; they are refusing us recognition.” Once we had ascertained the reason, however, the Israeli Palestinians began to air their taken-for-granted assumptions: “Why didn’t you find someone else? Our voice is never heard.” (As can be imagined, it had taken months and months to arrange this meeting, and it was simply not possible to turn on a dime and find someone else to replace the deputy minister.)

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After a long day under the hot July sun in Plovdiv, Bulgaria, we were all happy to reconvene in the air-conditioned room at the university. The atmosphere was pleasant, with people joking, when staff introduced a quandary to the group. Staff had not been able to decide among themselves if the group should or should not attend an Orthodox ritual that happens once a year in Plovdiv. Because people had been late boarding our bus the previous Sunday, we had missed worship at the Bulgarian Orthodox church in Velingrad-Kamenitza. Staff felt that this situation was not acceptable, since our tardiness had prevented our Orthodox fellows from participating in a mass. The local host had explained to the staff that there would be a special event happening the following Saturday night, just one day before the end of the program: a special liturgy read only once a year at the end of a long service. Some staff thought that this would be a wonderful opportunity for our Orthodox fellows. The caveat was that only baptized Orthodox individuals could attend this part of the liturgy, and that the church’s metropolitan, being a highly traditional person, would not allow others in the church at this time. Staff were afraid that the metropolitan would single out people who were obviously not Orthodox, such as people of color or those wearing the hijab, and worried that some of our fellows might not be able to attend the whole service, although it would start with a public procession that everyone could watch. Unable to agree on the importance of the visit for our program, the staff brought it to the fellows to negotiate among themselves. The atmosphere in the room changed as we learned about this possibility. One black African fellow (a priest, actually) said, “And do not tell me that it is not because of my skin color that I will not be invited in. I will not believe you.” He feared that he and his friends would be singled out because of their race. In the case of the Muslim women, it was their religion that would bar their entry. In the

discussion that followed, a Bulgarian Orthodox man asked one of the Muslim women why she could not remove her hijab, saying, “For God’s sake, you were not born with it!” The room exploded. Some fellows were appalled; others clapped in agreement. The noise actually drowned the second part of what he said: “And if you are asked to leave, even if I do not really understand that hijab thing, I will leave with you, as an act of solidarity.”

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The Metropolitan Church in Birmingham, England, is in a hardscrabble area of town, close to the railroad overpass and off some deserted streets. Its marginal status reflects that of the gay and lesbian community it serves. It is not surprising, then, that when confronted with close to forty foreign visitors from Israel, Palestine, Belarus, Albania, Bosnia, Bulgaria, France, Germany, Kyrgyzstan, the Netherlands, Pakistan, Russia, South Africa, Uzbekistan, and the United States, the congregants wanted to make the visitors feel welcome and accepted. To that end they invited each member of the group to take a flower from the central table, meditate on it, return it to the table, and then take the flower of another person who had done the same. Somewhere in the middle of the proceedings it was announced that all were partaking in the “Flower Communion,” a ritual recognized by the Unitarian Universalist Church. We can still see the faces of the two Muslim women (with heads covered) and one Jewish woman when the word *communion* was uttered. Flowers in hand, they were at a total loss—not knowing what to do or how to retreat from this ritual, which was after all Christian and so not theirs, but also not wanting to offend their hosts. We recall the chagrin of one of our Protestant fellows at the violation of boundaries between communities that sharing a communion implied (for him). The irony was that the English organizing team had feared that fellows from the Balkans, Middle East, and Far East might have trouble with the homosexuality of the church members, which turned out not to be the case at all; rather, the problems revolved around boundaries and the feeling of violation, perhaps even subtle religious coercion, that some experienced that day.²

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Incidents like these three happen every year, in every school, regardless of the formal topic. They are where the real learning of the school takes place.

The daily lectures, facilitation work in small groups, and site visits (to which all these stories pertain) are the structure, or scaffolding, upon which the real learning of the group, as a group, takes place. The process of sharing an experience, sorting out just what was and was not shared, and then constructing a common story of what happened is one of the school's prime learning tools. Real knowledge begins to emerge on the morning following the church visit in Birmingham, or the visit to the village of Anata, or the ceremony in the church in Plovdiv, when the group dissects the experience, begins to understand what happened, and sees how individuals with different group identities experienced what appeared to be a shared event differently. Christians taking part in the ritual came to see that the Muslims and Jews could not participate in the Flower Communion as they did. Some even came to appreciate the distance that at least one Protestant participant felt from a ritual that included all and, hence, seemed to belie the very purpose of ritual action. White participants could begin to understand the feelings of the Zimbabwean priest on being told he might be asked to leave the Orthodox church, and Israelis and Palestinians began to see how their own previous experiences made it virtually impossible to understand the plain meaning of the day's unfolding events (the deputy chief's absence).

This type of learning can take place only over time, after repeated meetings, as participants build a certain amount of trust in one another. To learn from shared experience, they must not only share the experience but also process it, give it form and language, and turn it into a story that they can tell others and, in so doing, make part of their common memory. The cognitive (academic, lecture-oriented) sessions of the school and the facilitation groups of five or six fellows (who remain a group throughout the program and share thoughts among themselves in response to questions posed by staff and related to school themes)—which are discussed in greater length in chapter 3—are all necessary tools to help formulate and validate what participants go through together.

While the situations described in the three vignettes occur in every school, usually more than once or twice in a program, they are not the stuff of everyday life there but only one aspect of it. For participants, daily routine at the school is, after all, a bustle of getting to class on time, or finding the buses taking them on the daily trips, or figuring out what staff meant in

today's facilitation question ("Relate a time when you were uncomfortable in a sacred space, whether sacred to your community of belonging or to that of another group"), or managing not to be last in the lunch line—or, perhaps most important, figuring out just who all these other fellows are and what the program is really about.

The daily lectures are (mostly) very interesting, though some lecturers are clearly more skilled than others. Being in a foreign country with so many unfamiliar people is, of course, fascinating. The daily trips too are both enjoyable and informative. Yet participants develop the sense early on that the trips are not simply that, but are actually connected in some way—not only to the lectures but also to some other aspect of the program that has not yet made itself felt. From the second or third day, fellows begin to feel that something is being asked or expected of them that is not in the advertised program—something other than absorbing information and processing new knowledge of the history or sociology or theology of the places they are living in or visiting.

Usually by the beginning of the second week, this inchoate sense begins slowly to find form: something is going on that has nothing to do with the lectures, or the trips, or even the small facilitation groups. What is going on is, in fact, the gradual restructuring of possibilities, the opening of new ways of thinking and interacting with others, and the emergence of new understandings of self in such interactions. Accepted definitions of self and other are challenged; long-established borders, or the lack thereof, are renegotiated; and a new sense, not only of difference, but also of the possibility of being "together apart," begins to dawn. Participants recognize that it is not necessary to tell themselves a story either of sameness or of converging interests in order to share a world with others. These modes of mutuality and civility, rooted in either a market model of social life (interests) or a more communitarian view of shared or common visions, are not the only options possible. Fellows can, in fact—and they learn this in fits and starts, over the course of the program—"live together differently" without conformity. Slowly—though every year is different in its rhythm, cadences, and the extent to which group processes are articulated openly—a group of difference is formed and a new form of solidarity tested.

Being together with about forty other people from breakfast at 7:30 A.M. until well after dinner, sometimes as late as 10:30 P.M., is an intense experi-

ence. The great diversity of each group, and each individual's starting assumptions, begin to be upended somewhere in the middle of the first week. Of course fellows must adhere to the full schedule of daily meals, classes, trips, group work, and films. On top of all that, sorting out what they thought they knew—of Jews, Muslims, Pomaks, Catholics, Russian Orthodox, homosexuals, Zionists, radical Muslims, Turks, or Tutsi—from their experiences of the people they are actually living with and daily experiencing and learning about is an exhausting and challenging task.

Viewing *We Are All Neighbours*, a documentary by Tone Bringa on the war in Bosnia and the breakdown of neighborliness leading to the destruction of the Muslim community, is one thing on a college campus in Boston or Bloomington, and quite another in the Balkans—especially when your fellow viewers there are the cohort you have lived with for the past ten days and include Serbs, Bosniaks, Croats, and Kosovars. In this latter case, the discussion after the film was fraught, loaded, and emotional, yet the Serb and Bosniak who were inseparable before the screening remained inseparable after it as well. Such a point is when fellows realize that there is more at play in human relations than their existing categories and ways of thinking allowed for.

Slowly, then, around the end of the first week, the school's only two rules, which seem so simple when first encountered, at last begin to make sense, however tough they are to obey.

Rule 1: You must come to every event. If you are to learn to live with “the other,” you have to be with her and share time, space, the table, and travel; going by yourself to the spa does not count. Fellows are here to be together, and after five days or so that is not an easy thing to do. But the sense of it begins to come through at this point, and commitment to the program is renewed.

Rule 2: You must recognize that no one has a monopoly on suffering. The importance of this second rule is soon even more obvious. After a week or so it becomes apparent that quite a few groups are making precisely the claim that they do have a monopoly on suffering: the Jews in reference to the Holocaust, the Africans in reference to slavery, the gays and lesbians in reference to their continued oppression, the Muslims in reference to their treatment today in Europe, the Palestinians in reference to the *nakba*, and so on. On the

one hand, it is not so easy for these group members to divest themselves of such claims; on the other, it becomes clear that only by at least holding such claims in abeyance, even if not fully renouncing them, can there be any room for the other.

And when, inside the Armenian Orthodox Church, one Turkish fellow (a lawyer from Ankara) personally apologizes to the priest for the Armenian genocide and both exchange a few words in Turkish that no one understands except the other Turkish fellow, it is evident that this is a very different type of program than anyone expected.

What is so difficult about being in the school is that fellows cannot retreat to their former, safe, and reassuring assumptions about self and other, us and them, our group and their group. Categories are challenged, assumptions no longer hold, and taken-for-granted views of one's own group and of the other are all thrown into disarray. What seemed a certainty is no longer so. Difference, fellows learn in the school, is neither good nor bad; it is just an unavoidable fact of life. Bringing fellows together for two weeks, where all must live together, share every meal, and participate in all school activities, makes this undeniable.

No concept of an overarching community is put forward to mask differences. Even swimming breaks, for example, in which an observant Muslim woman may not participate owing to modesty requirements, will underscore this reality. Entering one another's sacred space also provides a palpable experience of difference. Everything, from the architecture to the symbols to the rituals, is a reminder that this is not shared. Yet for others in the cohort, the school is taking place in their home environment, their place of belonging. Some are strangers, others are at home, and next week the situation may be reversed.

THE PROGRAM AND ITS PRACTICE

Central to the practice of the school is thus the building of an (albeit temporary) community of difference, where the different school fellows come, not as autonomous, liberal, individual, self-regarding moral agents, though they can be so if they wish, but mostly as members of different religious, ethnic, national, and racial communities—each with its own histories, fears, moral demands, and obligations. These lived worlds of difference are not left

at the door of the school, nor are they particularly celebrated or made the subject of some sort of show-and-tell. Rather, their obligations and encumbrances—for example, food restrictions for observant Jews and Muslims; travel restrictions on Sabbath for Jews; attendance at religious services for Christians on Sunday, Muslims on Friday, and Jews on Saturday—become part of the public life of the school. A shared public space is constructed where the differing commitments and obligations of the group members are recognized and accommodated as part of the schedule and shared life of the whole group.

The commitment to allow difference its public face and expression—and the discomfort this may engender among individuals from other communities who are school members—quickly led us to recognize that the usual ways of knowing developed in academia would not fit our agenda. A purely cognitive approach to learning and knowing was one that by definition privileged the private over the public; the individual over the group; the mind over the emotions; and the general, abstract, and formal over the messy, mangled particulars of life as it is really lived. To build a new form of shared, collective knowledge tied to the dynamics of group belonging—and so also the awareness of the role of group boundaries in structuring such knowledge—we needed to seek a different route: the rough ground of practice. What this required was the development of a pedagogy that in two intensive weeks combines cognitive, experiential, and affective ways of learning how to live with difference.

We share experience and what we call “embodied knowledge,” both of which are central to any attempt to construct new communities of understanding across different communities of belonging. Shared experience provides the necessary bases for constructing what are by definition new frames of knowledge across our different communities of belonging.

What makes the other *other*, one comes to learn, is not any ethnic or racial marker but the fact that the other tells different stories. Telling themselves different stories, the others inhabit a different moral—that is, normative—universe. The saliency of these differences is not easy to grasp in the abstract. Only when we really experience it can we understand just how serious the differences between disparate communities are and how deeply they are embedded in the stories those communities tell. Even among friends and

colleagues, who may share common space and understandings in the workplace or sports club, the experience of stepping into one another's communal narratives is profoundly disturbing. The shared frames of the liberal marketplace, or of individual aspirations such as we pursue in our consumer-driven worlds, all tend to shatter around the collective stories that are, in their essence, particular, exclusionary, and largely opaque to the other.

In fact, the problem of divergent meanings is not restricted to narratives but can often be found in the very meanings we attach to discrete words or images. Often, words come heavily laden with meanings, and while we in our innocence believe these to be shared across cultures and histories, this is far from the case. A particularly salient example of this divergence in meanings occurred in Bosnia and Herzegovina, in the city of Mostar. Many will remember the images of Mostar and its famous bridge (*mostar* means "bridge" in the Serbo-Croatian and Bosnian languages) that was shelled and destroyed by the Croatian forces of Franjo Tudjman in the 1992–1995 war in the former Yugoslavia. The bridge remained destroyed until the spring of 2006; and much of the town, especially the Bosnian side of the Neretva River, remained in ruins. In fact, even after the bridge was restored, much of the town continued to look like Stalingrad after the Germans were defeated there in World War II. As was said at the time, it is easier to reconstruct a bridge than to rebuild human relations, and while the international community invested millions in the historically accurate reconstruction of the sixteenth-century structure, the city remained fundamentally divided to the extent that Bosnian cell phone networks did not work on the Croatian side of the river; nor was it possible in 2006 to purchase a bus ticket to Sarajevo on that side.

The program and its fellows were in Mostar in 2006 after spending a difficult, somewhat dangerous, and extremely tense week in Stolac, fifty kilometers to the east. Stolac was then still the least reconstructed township in Bosnia and Herzegovina. A beautiful oasis of a town inhabited since Paleolithic times, it had a prewar population composed of Orthodox, Catholics, and Muslims. During the war the town's eleven mosques were totally destroyed and their stones scattered in nearby quarries and riverbeds. The Orthodox churches in the area were either destroyed or damaged. The Muslim population was forced to flee, pigs were roasted on the site of the central



Figure 1. Mostar Bridge being rebuilt.



Figure 2. In Mostar, the bridge that had been built by the Ottomans and had survived natural disasters and earlier wars became symbolic of the destruction of the Bosnian War. Figure 1 shows the reconstruction process of the bridge in 2003; this image of the reconstructed bridge is from 2006. Photos by David W. Montgomery.



Figure 3. The Mostar palace of Yugoslav President Josip Tito, which was destroyed during the Bosnian War and has served as one of many physical reminders of the war. Photo by David W. Montgomery, 2006.

mosque, and a torture center was erected on the outskirts of the town in a former orthopedic hospital. After the war, some of the Muslim population began to return, and a project to rebuild the mosques was initiated. The town, however, remained in a state of horrible tension, with de facto segregation in city government and in the schools; Muslim and Catholic children were put on totally different schedules so that they would not have to meet and interact in school. Muslim and Catholic citizens frequented different cafes, ate in different restaurants, and maintained no more than a minimum of contact. According to personnel from the U.S. Agency for International Development, it was the most unreconstructed township in Herzegovina and, in 2006, was still patrolled by members of the UN Stabilization Force. In fact, the reconstruction of the Charshiya (market) Mosque was initiated under the protection of the force's tanks parked outside the construction site.

We had been in Stolac as part of this project to help rebuild and restore mosques and Orthodox churches destroyed in the war. During our week there, many Catholic residents eyed us with great suspicion, some threats were made, and symbolic attacks on some of our (Muslim) hosts were



Figure 4. SFOR tank outside the Charshiya Mosque in Stolac, Bosnia.
Photo by David W. Montgomery, 2003.

perpetrated—for example, human urine was voided on the inside of a courtyard. After Stolac, Mostar was a most welcome relief. That first evening, walking in the reconstructed area around the bridge, with klieg lights illuminating that part of the town (and the destroyed area a good five hundred meters away), one of us (Seligman) was in the company of one of our fellows, a Catholic priest from Brazil, then resident at the Vatican. We had all had a few drinks and were extremely relaxed. Walking at night, Seligman pointed out to the priest the huge cross, over one hundred feet high, that dominated the skyline on the Croatian, Catholic, side of the river. Pointing out that it had not been there before the war and was a clear provocation to the Muslim population on the other side, he slapped the priest on the back and said, “See that cross there, that’s a bad one isn’t it?” At this, the priest, with whom Seligman was, and would remain, very friendly, got visibly upset, crossed himself, and said, “How can a cross be bad! Say it is poorly placed, say it is here provocative; but a cross cannot be bad.” Indeed, for a Catholic priest a cross cannot be bad. For an observant Jew (or for most observant Jews) its associative universe will always carry at least some negative meanings.

Thus the same word, not to mention the actual object, which ostensibly “means” the same for all, actually carries very different resonances, valences, associations, hues, and values depending on who we are and what context of meanings we carry inside. Indeed, how could a cross mean the



Figure 5. A cross on the hillside in Mostar marking the Croatian, Catholic, side of the river. Photo by David W. Montgomery, 2006.

same for an observant Jew as for a Catholic priest? How could it mean the same for even a secular Italian and a nonobservant Muslim (in Bosnia or anywhere else)? How could a cityscape with minarets resonate equally for an Indonesian Chinese and an Egyptian Muslim? We could go on with examples, but the point is clear. People believe that they share meanings, but the meanings they actually share are probably no more than 10 percent or so of those that are invoked.

There is, of course, one area where we do need to share meanings in order to engage in social interaction: when making use of generalized media of exchange—that is, money. But then we are limited to only one meaning on which we must agree: the price. Hence, when a woman sells the house she lived in for close to fifty years, it is not at all necessary to convey to the buyer what each and every crack in the wall or chipped paint on the banister means to her. In truth this agreement on price, together with the 10 percent (we posit somewhat haphazardly) overlap of other meanings, seems enough to allow us to get by and constitute a society—at least under “normal” circumstances. In these times we can easily fool ourselves into believing that we share deeper meanings, are indeed “of one mind” and “in tune” with one

another. However, and often enough, in periods of tension—economic crises, wars, revolutions, civic upheavals, and the like—these meanings break down. Or rather they seem to break down. They don't really break down, because they were actually never there to begin with. Only the illusion of shared meaning was there. When we are not pushed by circumstances to go much deeper than the pleasantries exchanged at a cocktail party, there is no reason to think that meanings diverge. When, however, we are forced to acknowledge different meanings, we generally feel a strong sense of betrayal, as the other no longer hews to our sense of meaning and purpose. Though of course that was never the case to begin with—it only appeared that way through the rituals of civic courtesy and the like.

The interesting—and increasingly crucial question—becomes: What do we do when meanings fall apart, or rather, when the curtain that hid the separate meanings we invested in those heavily freighted words (*love, responsibility, civic virtue, religion, cross, Muslim*, etc.) is torn asunder? What, then, is the next step? To a great extent, figuring out this next step is incumbent on all who seek a way to live together differently.

In fact, what is called for in such circumstances is analogous to what Donald Schön and Martin Rein term “reframing.”³ This involves a subtle process of both tweaking and accommodating existing beliefs. It does not require a wholehearted adoption of the other's perspective and the relegation of one's own to the dustbin of history. Rather, it is often evident in a conscious, or partially conscious, bracketing out of one's ultimate truth claims in light of a new appreciation of how complex and multivariate reality actually is. One does not undergo a conversion experience; rather, one learns that to accommodate the other in the pursuit of a common goal—perhaps a goal as mundane as living together in close proximity for two weeks—one must put on hold certain idols of the tribe or the marketplace that had been regarded as ultimate truths for far too long.

A Christian Evangelical fellow provided a good example of this at one school when he was forced to confront certain firm convictions of his and view them through a different frame. Close contact with Muslims—including, especially, Western liberal Muslims finishing doctoral studies at prestigious European universities—brought him to recognize that not everyone viewed the issue of conversion in the same light that he did. By the time the school

ended, he had come to see that, while he, as a Christian, could not forgo the idea of conversion to Christianity as an important good to be shared and propagated among all of humankind, he did now understand that Muslims perhaps saw the matter somewhat differently. Hence (and this is the critical point) he came to see that while he continued to believe in the virtues of conversion as a positive good, he could also, in order to share in civic life with non-Christians, imagine these conversions as taking place at the eschaton, when all hidden truths would be known. In this new position we can see the process of reframing at work. He did not eschew his previous position, nor did he reject his Christian past or come to assent to the Muslim position on conversion. Rather, he reframed his deeply held beliefs in a manner that could accommodate both his position and that of his Muslim interlocutors.

This individual was challenged even more deeply by the time he spent in a gay and lesbian church, where participants in the school also viewed *Trembling Before G-d*, a film about gay and lesbian Orthodox Jews. These are individuals who have been rejected by their families and communities—and as Judaism is a set of practices that can be observed only in community and in family, their isolation and pain were especially devastating to see. Indeed, it is a heartbreaking movie. Here, too, the young man did not change his view of homosexuality. But when he saw the reaction of religiously committed and observant individuals—Jews, Muslims, and especially Christians (including a vicar)—who saw primarily the pain and suffering of these individuals rather than their sexual practices, he too came to reframe his understanding of the issue away from morality and sexuality and toward compassion and empathy.

As these experiences shattered the Christian Evangelical fellow's relatively one-dimensional reality, what emerged was his recognition of complexity and the need for a more subtle response. Again, his response was not an abjuration of past positions and, by implication, past visions of self, but a new recognition that there are multiple frames through which reality can be viewed. How did this reframing, or decentering, occur? Through what cognitive processes did the reframing take place, and how can we characterize such processes?

Perhaps the key has to do with explanation. From an aphorism famously attributed to David Hume, we learn that "explanation is where the mind

rests.” Thus, explanation is not the arrival at some final truth, or the “real” state of affairs, the final causal or prime mover of whatever event or sequence of events we are inquiring into. This task is, in fact, simply beyond our power as human beings. Rather, we deem a particular conundrum explained when we cease, for whatever reason, to ask further questions. There is something pragmatic about this claim. For when does the mind rest? Minds are, after all, very busy things—always moving, restless, questioning, and querying. People spend a lifetime engaging in yoga and meditation to get the mind to rest. If so, when, indeed, does the mind rest? One place it rests is, most often, when the particular purpose of its questioning has been fulfilled. I may have a need to explain why the hammer is not in its proper place (because Joey forgot to return it after he made his workbox for shop) so as to be sure that next time it will be in its place (and I make a mental note to tell Joey in no uncertain terms to return my tools whenever he takes them). I do not need (or think I do not need) to know why Joey forgot to return the hammer (that is, it is irrelevant to me whether he forgot because his friend Pete called him out to play ball before he had finished cleaning up after he made the workbox, or because he came in for a glass of milk and dropped the bottle and slipped on the milk when cleaning it up and had to change his shirt and then his grandmother called, and so on). The endless litany of reasons is irrelevant to my purpose (of making sure the hammer is always returned to its place after use). The mind rests when the purpose for which an explanation has been pursued has been met.

We can observe this dynamic in action when we draw inferences to explain the behavior of others without full knowledge of them (and of course there is essentially no such thing as full knowledge of any person or situation). In such situations the purpose pursued, consciously or not, is a validation of our own existing assumptions or prejudices. The mind thus rests in a place where it is comfortable or habituated to resting, one that does not challenge our existing conceptions and perceptions of the world. In many ways the suspicion of just such a dynamic lies at the core of so much concern over police violence, especially of white police officers against young black males, which led to civil unrest in various cities in the United States in 2014 and 2015 (and to which we will turn in chapter 5).

The American pragmatist philosopher John Dewey offered one way to tackle this problem, by giving us the tools necessary to reframe our ideas

and so achieve a certain critical distance from them. Dewey defined an idea as “not some little psychical entity or piece of consciousness-stuff, but . . . the interpretation of the locally present environment in reference to its absent portion, that part to which it is referred as another part so as to give a view of the whole.”⁴ An idea, then, is a mental construct that frames and so gives meaning to (in Dewey’s terms, “interprets”) a given and empirically present reality in terms of a set of factors not immediately present. At the same time, by completing the picture of what is before me, it also serves to make it meaningful to me. For example, we may not know what that fellow from Bosnia is doing on the floor every day at about 1:15 P.M., but if we put that image together with ideas we have about Muslim prayer (five times a day, involving the salat, etc.) we can reach the conclusion that he is praying. What we wish to suggest is that the explanation at which the mind rests in fact constitutes Dewey’s definition of an idea. When we have an idea of something, it generally means that we have explained it to our satisfaction. Our satisfaction is in turn determined by our ability to frame the given reality facing us (the fellow from Bosnia on his knees) with sufficient supplementary information for us to know what to do (act respectfully toward him; or run to help him, because perhaps he is suffering from internal bleeding; or wait for further help to arrive; or—as was actually enacted in a most macabre fashion in at least one U.S. airport because it was feared to be a prelude to a suicide bombing—call the police).

Framing, then, is all about action. One frames in order *to do*. One’s frames are—or, as we maintain, should be understood to be—all about a *to do*. The mind comes to rest, and an explanation is proffered only in relation to some purpose. Explanation rests with an idea that we form of something; this idea is, according to Dewey, an amalgam of the currently available physical reality before us, together with additional, interpretive data that frames this reality in a broader, meaning-giving context defined by our specific purposes. In the case of attitudes toward police violence, the purpose may well be to substantiate our own views of police racism. In the case of the changing perceptions of our young fellow with regard to the Christian Evangelical mission as well as to gays and lesbians, what we saw was a reframing—that is, a recalibration of the specific purposes toward which the explanation (the

meaning-giving framework) was oriented. In fact, what took place there was a reframing of meaning through the positing of a new goal, or a new “to do.” Here, the new goal was the perceived need for a shared civic space or, at the very least, a two-week period of intensive shared interaction with others.

EMERGENT SPACES

It is this reframing that is so critical to the process of learning to live with difference. It allows us to present a story or narrative frame that the other may not share but can nevertheless negotiate and interact with, so that we can do things together as a result. To achieve this reframing, we must in essence eschew any final explanation and agree to set aside broad, inclusive, and generalized explanations of the other, even those that accord with our existing, taken-for-granted understandings of the world. And while none of us question our own belonging to meaning-giving communities (which could be Jewish, Muslim, Christian, secular-humanist, or something else), our shared environment and time together forces us to bracket out or tentatively suspend the types of explanations and ideas (precisely those interpretive frames around experience) that these communal memberships so often provide. What we must attempt to do, in fact, is to accept willfully and intentionally a new, shared experience and, at the same time, hold in abeyance the usual frames through which experience is interpreted. Doing so leads to a process of reframing or tweaking existing frames in a manner well illustrated by the story of the cosmic delay of conversion as perceived in the thought of our Evangelical friend.

Agreeing to submit ourselves to this hiatus in explanation is no mean feat. It is an extremely difficult and exhausting exercise, for it demands living in suspense and with an appreciation of the fact that our understanding of the situation is incomplete, doubtful, and problematic. We admit a lack of full knowledge, without yet accepting that we live in total ignorance; and by blurring any absolute distinction between the states of knowledge and ignorance, we set up the possibility of “forming conjectures to guide action”—the very process that Dewey described as the foundation of scientific thought.

To quote him at some length:

Reflective thinking is always more or less troublesome because it involves overcoming the inertia that inclines one to accept suggestions at their face value; it involves the willingness to endure a condition of mental unrest and disturbance. Reflective thinking, in short, means judgment suspended during further inquiry, and suspense is likely to be somewhat painful. . . . To maintain a state of doubt and to carry on a systematic and protracted inquiry—these are the essentials of thinking.⁵

This thinking through experience, suspending judgment even as one forms new conjectures leading us to new forms of action, is the heart of any experience of living with difference. In the particular realm of our interactions with people we understand as different—that is, as sharing different terms of meaning, who participate in different truth communities, and who generalize trust and sense of belonging in very different ways—this is especially challenging. Not surprisingly, it is precisely those differences in religious belonging (between Christians and Muslims, or Orthodox and Reform Jews) that are at the forefront of so much conflict in today's world. Significantly, this suspension of judgment and corresponding ability to live with ambiguity is a key element in John Paul Lederach's strictures on peacemaking and conflict resolution. It is this that allows interlocutors, and for that matter combatants, to break out of a polarized situation and find a resolution this side of violence.⁶

To refer back to the earlier quote by Dewey, what we seek to arrive at through the suspension of judgment is a situation in which the “absent portion” of the “present environment” is no longer defined by the collective representations that each of us brings to the encounter. Or perhaps more properly, when these representations are made public, they are most often challenged and thus shown to have much more to do with the reality of the group making the interpretation (Muslims of Jews, Christians of Muslims, Orthodox Jews of secular Jews, etc.) than to any “objective” or “empirical” reality that is “out there,” outside the representations of the group in question. This is the value gained by the suspension of judgment.

What is created at the end of the two-week program is an opening of possibilities and the emergence of new spaces and modes of interaction. Paradoxically, by recognizing differences, we can often make connections that

are lost by denying them. An ideology of sameness and relative homogeneity traps us into continually maintaining a false reality. On the other hand, acceptance of difference frees us from investing vast amounts of time and energy in what is essentially a pretense. As noted earlier, the first step in this process is the realization that knowledge must be understood as *knowledge for* (action) rather than *knowledge of* (content). We can never know the other in his or her essence, but we can know what we need to do in order to work with her or him to fulfill this promise or complete that project. This knowledge, based on an orientation toward joint action, or joint “problem-posing,” is the opposite of the more common “banking” model of teaching and learning that educators and reformers such as Paulo Freire were so keen to overcome.⁷ Like him, we recognize that to truly learn to “be with” is a matter of both the head and the heart, of cognition as well as affect—joined in a shared purpose.⁸

In fact, by the end of the program, fellows have assembled a working tool kit of the following guidelines to further such reflective thinking and openings to shared experience:

- + Hold all claims to absolute truth in abeyance.
- + Recognize the partial nature of any and all understandings.
- + Allow experience to precede judgment.
- + Place *knowledge for* action above *knowledge of* others.
- + In approaching “the other,” distance yourself from commitments to your own group.

These are the tools, or building blocks, with which CEDAR equips fellows for use in the new space for interaction and joint action with those who are different.