“The Circle of Reconciliation” as a Tool for Healing and “Re-membering” our Pasts

A Peace Educator’s Guide

The Circle of Reconciliation is centered on Olga Botcharova’s (2001) understanding of the process of reconciliation, which includes two circles: an inner circle of violence, and an outer circle of healing. In order for one to heal and reconcile with the past and with others, one must move out of the inner cycle of revenge and violence, and move into the outer cycle of healing and reconciliation.

Kelly Hill
The Circle of Reconciliation is centered on Olga Botcharova’s (2001) understanding of the process of reconciliation, which includes two circles: an inner circle of violence, and an outer circle of healing. In order for one to heal and reconcile with the past and with others, one must move out of the inner cycle of revenge and violence, and move into the outer cycle of healing and reconciliation.

I first learned about the Circle of Reconciliation in a class at the Boston University School of Theology in a class entitled “The Spirit and Art of Conflict Transformation.” Last summer, when I participated in a peacebuilding program through Global Youth Connect in Bosnia-Herzegovina, I was reintroduced to model of the Circle of Reconciliation, through a ritual which has transformed my perspective of relationships with the other.

The Circle of Reconciliation as a ritual/activity was introduced to me by Vahidin Omanavic, local imam and director of the Center for Peacebuilding in the village of Sanski Most. At first, Vahidin told us the story about his experience during and after the Bosnian War. He shared his own experiences of loss of friendships, death of family members, and exclusion from his community as a refugee in Slovenia. While sharing his story, at every stage, he explained to us where he was in the process of reconciliation. He shared with us how knowing about the circle of reconciliation allowed him to see himself as going through a process – rather than being stagnant – even as he continued to deal with pain, shock, and denial in the cycle of violence. He then shared with us, how – slowly – began to move out of that circle of violence and revenge into the circle of healing and reconciliation.

On the other side of the room, Vahidin had placed on the floor, in a circle the various stages of the circle of reconciliation. He then encouraged us to choose a conflict in our own lives, and place ourselves on the circle in relation to a conflict we had or are continuing to experience in our own lives. Each person in the group had an opportunity to share – as they were comfortable – their conflict, and where and why they were at whatever stage of the circle they were in.

This activity was by far one of the most emotional and powerful activities I have ever done in my life. Hearing each of the participant’s heartfelt and intimate experiences, every person in the circle was in tears more than once throughout the night. The activity lasted for five hours, each of us sharing something deeply personal to ourselves. Listening to the stories of each participant reminded me that I could never judge someone or understand why they thought or acted in ways different from my own. Like the beauty of the Bosnian countryside, which sometimes makes it hard to imagine some of the horrible atrocities that could have occurred here, the activity reminded me that pain often belies beauty, and reminds us how fragile and deceptive beauty and peace can be. Indeed, each person has had their own experiences of personal trauma and suffering which have affected them in ways we can never know, unless we create opportunities for them to share and for us to listen to their stories. For me, the activity allowed me to see my new friends (on the Global Youth Connect delegation) in a new, more intimate light. Hearing each story gave me insight into why each delegate might react in different ways to the difficult issues we would be discussing during our time in Bosnia. The activity helped us to understand the varied stages on the journey of healing and reconciliation that each of us were at, even as we called ourselves “peacebuilders” on a so-called human rights delegation. The activity reminded me of a quote by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, “If we could read the secret history of our enemies, we should find in each man's life sorrow and suffering enough to disarm all hostility.” I wondered what results we might be if every
person were to do this powerful activity with anyone who had ever hurt them, and how much more love there might be in the world.

At the end of the activity, we all held hands. Led by Vahidin, the local imam, we sang the Christian hymn Amazing Grace, this time with new meaning for me. Past experiences, cultural and religious backgrounds, and other differences truly seemed to disappear. Our stories of pain and suffering had been shared and heard, setting us free, allowing us to truly open ourselves up to the warm loving embrace of others.

"Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me....
I once was lost but now I’m found was blind but now I see..."

This ritual during the summer of 2011 has been the inspiration for an adapted version of the Circle of Reconciliation activity which is outlined in this book for educators who would like to share this ritual of reconciliation and healing with those in your families, communities, churches, schools, and other places of gathering.
Preparing to Teach the ‘Circle of Reconciliation’

Goals:

1. Understand the personal and communal aspects of The Circle of Reconciliation process.
2. Reflect upon their own journeys in The Circle of Reconciliation, and acceptance of their own position in the process.

Materials Needed:

1. Large flat white bed sheet or poster
2. Paper
3. Drawing materials (e.g. crayons, markers, color pencils)
4. Permanent market

The educator should draw a large version of the Circle of Reconciliation on the bed sheet or poster. This will be an instructional tool used later during the lesson. The large Circle of Reconciliation on the poster/bed sheet can be laid out on the floor as an instructional visual aid when lecturing about the Circle of Reconciliation, and students can sit on it as they talk about their processes in the Circle of Reconciliation.

The Lesson Plan (in brief)

The lesson plan has four primary components: (1) a lecture introducing the Circle of Reconciliation as a model for processes of personal, interpersonal and community peacebuilding; (2) a discussion centering on the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32), exploring how this Bible story can be read through the lenses of the Circle of Reconciliation; (3) a artistic project giving each student an opportunity to reflect upon the Circle of Reconciliation within a conflict in each of their own lives – which they are currently experiencing or had already experienced; and (4) sharing stories and reflecting upon the multiple processes of reconciliation at work within the student community.
1. Introduce The Circle of Reconciliation as a tool in the processes of personal, interpersonal, and community peacebuilding.

   1. Introduce the Circle of Reconciliation to students as a process of healing: one must break out of the inner circle of violence and revenge in order to begin an process of healing, forgiveness and reconciliation. The process is not uni-directional, and people may fall into the inner circle of vengeance and violence at any time. The key is understanding that we have a choice, and realizing that we are all on a process – not stagnant beings – that there is hope for transformation, regardless of how slow we may seem to be moving.

---

1. Trauma healing is both a decision and a process
2. Trauma healing is not unidirectional
3. The key is that we have a choice meaning that we are the ones to decide if we want to heal our trauma and embark on the journey of forgiveness and reconciliation. – Amela Puljek-Shank

---

Recognizing Trauma: the “Inner Circle”

1. Realization of Loss
   - Filled with the fear of realizing the horrible truth mixed with the fear of looking into the future
   - Overwhelmed to imagine life without that which we lost
   - The more dramatic and sudden the change is, the greater the sense of loss experienced

2. Denial and the Suppression of Grief/Fears
   - Trauma destroys our sense of security in the world; denial allows us to let in only as much pain as we can tolerate at one time
   - Denial and suppression are common survival mechanisms which help us pace ourselves through the process of adjusting to catastrophic loss
   - In trying to avoid pain, we do everything to not get deeply into the grief or confront the fears of past and future
   - Circumstances in many conflict situations are usually not favorable for the time needed for lamenting and mourning.

3. Anger: “Why me?”
   - Allowing oneself to feel the fury of hate and anger, especially when one has been abused, violated or severely wronged, is often a healthy part of the recovery process
   - Feeling anger toward the perpetrator(s) may be the only resource available that allows some personal respect to be maintained.
   - Anger turned inward is often evidenced by the question: “Did I do something to cause this?”

4. Desire for Justice/Revenge
   - Punitive justice may turn into a quest or crusade for revenge
   - While rage and revenge fantasies appear initially to bring relief, the opposite is true. Repetitive revenge fantasies actually increase the victim’s torment, making the survivor feel like a monster—‘just like them’ (Herman)

5. Telling and Re-Telling the “Right” Conflict Story
   - Creating myths/heroes that play well in the revenge conflict story
   - Writing a history that supports the “ingroup” (victim’s group) and demonizes the “outgroup” (offender/enemy group)
   - Placing the blame entirely on the “other” so victim needs to take no responsibility

6. Act of “Justified Aggression”
   - Victim becomes the aggressor who victimizes and continues around the inner circle again, now as the aggressor but believing self to still be victim

---

Reconciling Trauma: the “Outer Circle”

1. Mourning and Expressing Deep Grief
   - Knowledge that grief experienced does dissolve over time
   - Often a fear of being overcome if one allows the tears to flow
   - Seeing some glimpse of new life even as the ashes are brushed away

2. Accepting Loss and Confronting Fears
   - Survivors need to (1) separate themselves from the events that have happened to them; and (2) integrate the events into their lives
   - Integrating the grief and pain by deciding to heal, believing and understanding what happened and trusting yourself
   - Deciding to remember and move on

3. “Why Them?” Re-humanizing the Enemy
   - Moving from total victim self-absorption to some recognition of the other
   - Curiosity about how the “other” got involved; seeing the common humanity in the other; the survivor begins the slow transformation and may even feel the hidden pain of the abuser.
   - Realizing that not punishing the “other” does not mean forgetting what happened, but rather recognizing that we can never truly get even and that an inner peace comes when we give up trying
   - Seeing the Divinity in the enemy

4. Moving Beyond Tolerance
   - A beginning baby step of trust beyond a willingness to just co-exist
   - Finding a survivor mission—some meaning in the ashes

5. Choice to Forgive; Commitment to Take Risks
   - Not at all forgive and forget
   - Ability to transform the impulse for revenge into a search for something larger
   - Realizing that nothing we do to punish another person or group will heal ourselves
   - Seeing that this frees us to put to better use the energies once consumed by holding grudges, harboring resentments and nursing unhealed wounds

6. “Re-Writing” History, Negotiating Solutions and Joint Planning
   - Revising the trauma story to be both honest and constructive
   - Walking through history together, openly examining wounds on all sides, sorting out truth from falsehood and recognizing mutual responsibilities
   - Sincere apology, symbols of repentance and an open confirmation of good will
   - The trauma prisoner/survivor needs to make some sense out of the suffering—“to find some purpose and meaning in the suffering” (Frankl, Man’s Search for Meaning, 1959)

7. Establishing Justice That Restores
   - Restorative justice which focuses on relationship and restitution
   - Restoring victims as well as offenders to the community
   - Repairing the social injury and right relationship

8. Moving Toward Reconciliation and Trauma-based Conflict Transformation
   - Does not mean that I forget what has happened—or condone it in any way. Forgiving and forgetting is precisely what has disallowed many from achieving true forgivingness

---


2. **Discussion about the Prodigal Son**

1. Read the Prodigal Son Story together (Luke 15:11).
2. Three students will perform a role-play for the prodigal son story.
3. Interview the students who performed the role-play regarding their location within the Circle of Reconciliation, and discuss how they felt during different stages of the role-play.
4. Discuss with the class how the characters journeyed through their processes of Reconciliation, and how they related to the characters at different points during the process of reconciliation within the family.


http://www.biblekids.eu/new_testament/Prodigal_%20Son/Prodigal_%20Son_html/Prodigal_%20Son_7.html
The Parable of the Prodigal and His Brother (Luke 15:11-32)

Then Jesus said, ‘There was a man who had two sons. The younger of them said to his father, “Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.” So he divided his property between them. A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and travelled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. But when he came to himself he said, “How many of my father’s hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.’ ” So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. Then the son said to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.” But the father said to his slaves, “Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!” And they began to celebrate. ‘Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. He replied, “Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound.” Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. But he answered his father, “Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!” Then the father said to him, “Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.”’

For A Theological Reflection on the Parable of the Prodigal Son, which focuses the processes of reconciliation for (1) the younger son, (2) the father, and (3) the older son, see “The Open Arms of the Father,” written by Miroslav Volf in Exclusion and Embrace.

“The Open Arms of the Father” A Reflection on the Parable of the Prodigal Son
In Miroslav Volf’s Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness and Reconciliation, p. 156-165.
http://books.google.com/books/about/Exclusion_and_embrace.html?id=n5ARAQAAIAAJ
3. **Make Mandalas.**
   1. Explain to students the spiritual/religious significance of the mandala as a tool for meditation and deeply understanding oneself.
   2. Instruct the students to create a mandala (drawing) that represents their location in the process of The Circle of Reconciliation in a (current or past) conflict their own lives and their journey within that process of reconciliation.
   3. Allow for at least 20 minutes for students to engage in the creation of their mandalas, in order for students to tap into their creative unconscious.
   4. In order to prepare students for sharing their stories, teachers should make sure students that they may be invited to share their stories and/or mandalas in the next activity of the lesson plan.

---

**Why use a Mandala?**
In various spiritual traditions (including Buddhism, Hinduism and Christianity), mandalas are employed as a spiritual teaching tool for establishing a sacred space, and as an aid to meditation and trance induction. According to David Fontana, its symbolic nature can help one “to access progressively deeper levels of the unconscious, ultimately assisting the meditator to experience a mystical sense of oneness with the ultimate unity from which the cosmos in all its manifold forms arises.” For more information, see Wikipedia contributors, "Mandala," *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Plagiarism&oldid=5139350 (accessed April 9 2012).
4. Sharing our Stories

1. Gather your students to the center of the room, near the large representation of the Circle of Reconciliation.
2. Ask students to place their mandalas which represent a stage in their journey through the Circle of Reconciliation and place their mandalas on the respective section of the (larger community) Circle of Reconciliation.
3. Invite students to sit in a circle and to share their stories and/or their mandalas as they relate to the processes of reconciliation in their own lives represented in their artistic creations (mandalas) as they feel comfortable.
4. Give enough waiting time for students who feel comfortable to open up and share. Don’t be afraid of the silence, and don’t pressure students to share. The deeply personal aspect of sharing one’s stories necessitates that teachers gently care for their students when engaging these moments.
5. In order to prepare students for sharing their stories, teachers should make sure students know well ahead of time that they may be invited to share their stories, and clarify that students what they feel comfortable sharing.
6. At the end of the activity, invite students to come together and hold hands in a circle or embrace, and sing a song as a part of a closing ritual. “Amazing Grace” “Bind us together in love, Lord” are possible suggestions.

“We are who we are not because we are separate from the others who are next to us, but because we are both separate and connected, both distinct and related; the boundaries that mark our identities are both barriers and bridges.”

– Miroslav Volf

“The self is dialogically constructed… I am who I am in relation to the other.”

– Miroslav Volf

Appendix : Additional Reading Materials

At The Fork in the Road: Trauma Healing

by Nancy Good, October 10, 2001


(Note: This article was originally published in Conciliation Quarterly, a publication of Mennonite Conciliation Services, Spring 2001; Vol. 20, No. 2. Used by permission.)

As peacebuilders, we must learn to recognize and examine the trauma that often smolders beneath conflict. We might be able to provide a quick fix, but we can’t transform the presenting conflict without uncovering — or somehow attending to — the underlying trauma. The conflict can actually worsen. Victims are re-traumatized and, if the trauma goes unhealed, the victim may become the aggressor; the abused may become the abuser.

Peacebuilders make peace everyday with the picture of dead bodies before their eyes and the sound of bombing in their ears. In order to transform conflict in these situations, the peacebuilder must first address the rage, anger, outrage and denial that results from this trauma.

The further risk to peacebuilders in ignoring trauma is the potential for peacebuilders themselves to become traumatized (or paralyzed) by not recognizing the power and danger of working in intense trauma conflict-filled areas. Researchers have named this occurrence as vicarious traumatization or secondary traumatization (Journal of Traumatic Stress, 1990). This phenomenon looks at how caregivers can be as susceptible to a similar traumatization as the primary victims. We do not need to have the actual physical events occur to us directly to be traumatized. Reliving them mentally can have a similar emotional effect to the direct violence that occurred. This provides another reason for peacebuilders working in trauma conflict situations to understand trauma and trauma healing.

Description of Trauma

Ordinary stress is common in all our lives. We know that a healthy amount of stress in our lives helps us feel alive and stimulated. However, when we feel unable to cope with important demands or expectations placed upon us, we experience distress. This distress is different from traumatic stress in that it is gradual and less intense.

Traumatic stress is a piercingly intense, surprising occurrence outside the range of usual human experience. It would frighten almost anyone. Following the genocide in Rwanda, a children’s booklet defined trauma as, “a normal response to an abnormal situation when something scary or bad happens to you.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ordinary Stress</th>
<th>Traumatic Stress</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>* Slow or gradual change</td>
<td>* Sudden significant loss</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* Wearing down over time</td>
<td>* Piercing intensity; shock to system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* Able to plan and problem-solve</td>
<td>* Overwhelming sense of helplessness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* People affected differently</td>
<td>* Terror; frightens almost anyone</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Trauma may be caused by destructive acts of nature (earthquakes, tornado, flash floods) or accidents (car/plane crashes causing disability or death) resulting in sudden, significant loss. A more pernicious form of trauma may be caused by violence, injustice or wrongdoing at the hands of another person or group. It is this latter type of trauma that is the focus of this article.

Trauma Healing Map
Trauma healing entails recognizing and reconciling trauma. It can be seen as a map of concentric circles. The inner circle may be towards a natural, instinctive revenge journey and the outer circle may follow a journey moving towards reconciliation. The inner circle might describe how to recognize trauma-based conflict and the outer circle would describe how to reconcile trauma-based conflict.

Recognizing Trauma: the “Inner Circle”

7. Realization of Loss
   - Filled with the fear of realizing the horrible truth mixed with the fear of looking into the future
   - Overwhelmed to imagine life without that which we lost
   - The more dramatic and sudden the change is, the greater the sense of loss experienced

8. Denial and the Suppression of Grief/Fears
   - Trauma destroys our sense of security in the world; denial allows us to let in only as much pain as we can tolerate at one time
Denial and suppression are common survival mechanisms which help us pace ourselves through the process of adjusting to catastrophic loss.

In trying to avoid pain, we do everything to not get deeply into the grief or confront the fears of past and future.

Circumstances in many conflict situations are usually not favorable for the time needed for lamenting and mourning.

9. **Anger: “Why me?”**
   - Allowing oneself to feel the fury of hate and anger, especially when one has been abused, violated or severely wronged, is often a healthy part of the recovery process.
   - Feeling anger toward the perpetrator(s) may be the only resource available that allows some personal respect to be maintained.
   - Anger turned inward is often evidenced by the question: “Did I do something to cause this?”

10. **Desire for Justice/Revenge**
    - Punitive justice may turn into a quest or crusade for revenge.
    - While rage and revenge fantasies appear initially to bring relief, the opposite is true. Repetitive revenge fantasies actually increase the victim’s torment, making the survivor feel like a monster—“just like them” (Herman).

11. **Telling and Re-Telling the “Right” Conflict Story**
    - Creating myths/heroes that play well in the revenge conflict story.
    - Writing a history that supports the “ingroup” (victim’s group) and demonizes the “outgroup” (offender/enemy group).
    - Placing the blame entirely on the “other” so victim needs to take no responsibility.

12. **Act of “Justified Aggression”**
    - Victim becomes the aggressor who victimizes and continues around the inner circle again, now as the aggressor but believing self to still be victim.

### Reconciling Trauma: the “Outer Circle”

9. **Mourning and Expressing Deep Grief**
   - Knowledge that grief experienced does dissolve over time.
   - Often a fear of being overcome if one allows the tears to flow.
   - Seeing some glimpse of new life even as the ashes are brushed away.

10. **Accepting Loss and Confronting Fears**
    - Survivors need to (1) separate themselves from the events that have happened to them; and (2) integrate the events into their lives.
    - Integrating the grief and pain by deciding to heal, believing and understanding what happened and trusting yourself.
    - Deciding to remember and move on.

11. **“Why Them?” Re-humanizing the Enemy**
    - Moving from total victim self-absorption to some recognition of the other.
    - Curiosity about how the “other” got involved; seeing the common humanity in the other; the survivor begins the slow transformation and may even feel the hidden pain of the abuser.
    - Realizing that not punishing the “other” does not mean forgetting what happened, but rather recognizing that we can never truly get even and that an inner peace comes when we give up trying.
    - Seeing the Divinity in the enemy*

12. **Moving Beyond Tolerance**
    - A beginning baby step of trust beyond a willingness to just co-exist.
    - Finding a survivor mission—some meaning in the ashes.

13. **Choice to Forgive; Commitment to Take Risks**
    - Not at all forgive and forget.
    - Ability to transform the impulse for revenge into a search for something larger.
    - Realizing that nothing we do to punish another person or group will heal ourselves.
    - Seeing that this frees us to put to better use the energies once consumed by holding grudges, harboring resentments and nursing unhealed wounds.
14. “Re-Writing” History, Negotiating Solutions and Joint Planning
   - Revising the trauma story to be both honest and constructive
   - Walking through history together, openly examining wounds on all sides, sorting out truth from falsehood and recognizing mutual responsibilities
   - Sincere apology, symbols of repentance and an open confirmation of good will
   - The trauma prisoner/survivor needs to make some sense out of the suffering—“to find some purpose and meaning in the suffering” (Frankl, Man’s Search for Meaning, 1959)

15. Establishing Justice That Restores
   - Restorative justice which focuses on relationship and restitution
   - Restoring victims as well as offenders to the community
   - Repairing the social injury and right relationship

16. Moving Toward Reconciliation and Trauma-based Conflict Transformation
   - Does not mean that I forget what has happened—or condone it in any way. Forgiving and forgetting is precisely what has disallowed many from achieving true forgivingness

Three general guidelines as we consider the two circles on this map:

1. *Trauma healing is both a decision and a process*. The initial choice involves the decision to move toward healing or stay in the react/revenge/get even inner cycle. Trauma healing is also a process, in that it entails my being patient with myself (and others if a whole community is traumatized) as I go through this journey.

2. *Trauma healing is not one directional*. It clearly is not linear. Like the grief stages, a person jumps around rather than follow a tidy progression from one stage to the next. Trauma healing, like trauma itself, is messy, confusing, intense and overwhelming. Persons often jump around, surviving the best they can. Some may even move to the outer circle only to find themselves back in the inner circle again having a desire for revenge.

3. *The key is knowing that choice is available*. Amela Puljek-Shank, currently a graduate student in Eastern Mennonite University’s Center for Justice and Peacebuilding, recalls the helpfulness of this trauma healing map. As a survivor of the Bosnian War, Amela shared how the trauma healing map assisted her by providing a visual representation of the trauma itself. At that time her trauma experience was a confusing and overwhelming emotional experience which included flashbacks and a pervasive fear of remembering the atrocities of war. Finally she was able to get a visual representation of the inner emotional experience as well as another path that might take her toward healing. “In the war situation with the anger, hate and revenge, I could see how I could never basically heal if I was staying in the inner circle of trauma anger and wanting to do violence. From the diagram, I began to see that I had a choice to remain in the inner circle of trauma or move to the outer circle of trauma healing: a choice to heal rather than to hate and kill; a choice to possibly become a healthy individual again; a choice to take some steps to move back home after displacement—home to my spirit, my body, my homeland.”

Amela is clear that people who want to do the work of peacebuilding and conflict transformation where trauma has occurred, need to receive training in trauma healing and recovery. She thinks trauma should be a core course in any peacebuilding curriculum. “You can make peace on the governmental level and think that our work is over but when 2 million people are displaced and traumatized? How can you make peace when trauma healing does not take place? How can we heal conflicts if we don’t have any idea how to heal traumas? To create real peace, there needs to be recognition of the trauma and time for trauma healing to take place—at the national level as well as individual level.”

**Fork in the Road Decision: Choosing to Move from Inner Circle to Outer Circle**

Why let go and move to the outer circle? Why forgive or even think about it? The pain, violation or injustice is so great that the main impulse—which can stay for months and years—is to get even. The survivor needs to find some answers to the question as to why move on. Sometimes we need to go round and round the inner circle until we are certain that we have to—and gradually choose to—take another kind of healing path. We find out that nothing new or good under the sun is in the inner circle of anger, revenge and hatred and actually discover that we have become like the enemy. The bitterness is destructive for the self as well as the other. The outer circle is so unnatural that we have to be sure that some of the reactions that come so humanly, so instinctively are not any good for us or our communities.
The Paradox of Trauma Healing: In Order to Forget, We Need to Remember

As peacebuilders, we are beginning to ask the questions of what to do in the aftermath of trauma. How do we remember and tell the trauma story so as not to re-traumatize? In her book *Between Vengeance and Forgiveness*, Martha Minow describes a two-year study where these questions were asked. Minow, with an organization called, Facing History and Ourselves, explored the range of possible institutional responses to collective violence, genocide, apartheid and war.

After these atrocities, “what lessons can be learned—what should be taught—to young people growing up in a world that has known, and still produces incomprehensible patterns of violence and torture? Would it be better to shield young people from the fact of those patterns until they grow up? The wager made by programs like Facing History and Ourselves is that young people would do better to learn about the horrors that have occurred at the hands of adults than to be subject to silence about the events that still shape their world. Young people, understandably, want to know what has been done, and what can be done, to respond, redress, and prevent future occurrences”.

We know that forgive and forget does not work and, in fact, layers on more trauma. The question continues to beg for a creative healing and restoring response to trauma: how to remember and move on so that the trauma story is healed and the conflict transformed. As peacebuilders, our mission is to hear the trauma story, revise it and receive a fuller picture of the truth(s) of the trauma and begin to hold it differently so as to live into another story for our future.

*Nancy Good – PhD, MSW – is the former professor of Trauma Studies at Eastern Mennonite University’s Center for Justice and Peacebuilding.*