

Mediator's Corner

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Facilitating Compromise

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This awareness prompted me to enroll in a graduate program in Peace and Conflict Studies, whose student body consisted equally of Palestinians and Israelis. During class introductions, it became clear that all the Israelis had been in the army and all the Palestinian men in army prisons (incarcerated due to their role in the first Intifada).

Needless to say, our classroom experience was volatile. Listening to narratives that negated one's own story, pain, and even existence was difficult. (One day, somebody even took off his shoe and threw it at a classmate!) But we gradually became aware that we were reading different history books, digesting a press with a particular perspective, and absorbing the experiences of family, friends, and ancestors with a one-dimensional view of regional events. And at the end of each day, no matter what had been discussed in the classroom, we all ate and communed together.

This experience brought home to me the awareness that "truth" and "justice" are not as satisfying as accommodation and understanding. As soon as I started practicing law, I felt uncomfortable approaching every problem with the hammer of litigation (to paraphrase Mark Twain). Hanging out my mediation shingle became an existential necessity. And while some cases are all about the money, and some seem more challenging (emotionally) than actually solving the Middle East crisis, I am satisfied that I go to work each day to facilitate compromise.