EXISTENTIALIST WRITINGS AND THE ENHANCING OF TRUST: A METHOD DEVELOPED IN BUBERIAN LEARNING GROUPS

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During more than three decades of hostility, few attempts have been made to develop trust between Jews and Arabs living in Israel. This paper describes one method used successfully in the Education for Peace Project at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev. The description concentrates on the use of existentialist essays and short stories as a basis of a dialogical discussion which will enhance trust. Excerpts from the discussions which show how the method has been used are presented.

INTRODUCTION

One can characterize the relations between many Jews and Arabs living today in Israel as being based on existential mistrust, which may be defined as a relationship that arises between two persons (or two nations) when one of the persons (or one of the nations) believes that the other person (or nation) denies his right to exist and to realize his potential in that portion of the world to which he is attached. The relationship is expressed by the attitude: If I want to exist, I must *not* trust you.[1] This mistrust hinders attempts to establish sincere relations between Jews and Arabs and often distorts the mistrusting person's way of life. Unfortunately, little has been done to diminish this mistrust. Attempts to bring to greater Jewish-Arab understanding have either stressed the casual and the superficial, such as explaining the different norms or customs, or they have been based on joint political or economic endeavors, which have had little effect on personal relations beyond that specific endeavor.[2] Before the Education for Peace Project (based on the Buberian Learning Group) was initiated in 1979, there had been virtually no long-term attempts to diminish existential mistrust between Jews and Arabs. Here and there short conflict resolution seminars were held, but these failed to follow up on their stated objectives (Levi and Benjamin, 1976; 1977). Other Jewish-Arab meetings were characterized by apprehension which did not touch upon existential or political problems. If they did touch upon such problems the meeting exploded and the groups stopped meeting.

The uniqueness of the Education for Peace Project was in the developing of the Buberian Learning Group as an educational approach which attempted to diminish existential mistrust by working in three interrelated realms. The first realm is the teaching of Buber's dialogical thought and the ways in which a person may attempt to realize that thought (Gordon, 1980). The second realm is the teaching of existentialist writings in a manner which diminishes existential mistrust. The third realm is the relating of what has been learned to specific Jewish-Arab problems. As shall become evident in the following, in the educational process these realms often blend.

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A Buberian Learning Group includes approximately 15-20 participants who meet weekly and are led (ideally) by a Jew and an Arab working together. During the two years of participation in a group the participants[3] engage in additional activities, among them seminars, a trip to Egypt or other Moslem country, workshops, discussions of readings, personal meetings. An overview of these activities has been described elsewhere, including a report of some of the educational goals achieved with the two hundred and fifty participants who entered the project during the first three years. (Gordon, 1980; Gordon and Demarest, 1982). Initial findings indicate that at least 30% of the Jews and 20% of the Arabs had made progress which they defined as significantly influencing their life in all three realms described above. Another 30% of each ethnic group had made little progress, but understood the direction in which they should progress if they wished to diminish mistrust and to realize Buber's thought. 40% of the Jews and 50% of the Arabs either dropped out or were not influenced in any significant manner in any of the above three realms.

Previous discussions did not present in detail the specific methods that have been developed. Here one such method shall be described: the discussion of existentialist writings in a manner that enhances trust. Although this method is inherent to the process undergone in a Buberian Learning Group, one suspects that it can be adapted to other contexts, i.e., Protestant-Catholic strife in Northern Ireland. Underlying this method is the assumption that certain writings of Buber, Kafka, Nietzche, Sartre, Dostoyevsky, and other existentialists can be taught so as to encourage the student to alter his or her way of life in accordance with the insights, suggestions, and demands found in those writings. Ontologically, this assumption is based on the view, held by many existentialists, that reading is an act of freedom which can arouse the reader to articulate previously uncomprehended aspects on his or her life, and perhaps free himself or herself from certain unvirtuous relations. (Gordon, 1978).

It is important to emphasize that the method is based on Buberian dialogue, which pervades all three realms. In true dialogue, according to Buber, each participant gives what he or she can without trying to manipulate the other or the conversation. At first, the student learns Buber's thoughts on dialogue and is personally instructed how to relate dialogically. Later, existentialist writings are discussed in an atmosphere of dialogue; in addition each participant is required to attempt to develop dialogue with members of the other ethnic group. Thus dialogue is both a subject matter of learning and a way of relating within the group. In order to enhance trust, other topics central to human existence such as dread, anxiety, bad faith, guilt, freedom, love, are also discussed. The basis of such discussions is provided by existentialist writings.

The topics discussed and depicted by existentialists can best be fathomed when one relates to them through one's own experience. For instance, if one lectures at length about the objective virtues of dialogue or of love, even the dull student will soon perceive that something in amiss--that one resembles a person in a bathing suit on a sunny beach who is attracted by the shimmering radiance of the sea and is forced to listen to a lengthy lecture on the virtues of giving oneself to the waves. In short, discussing existentialist writings abstractly is often a sterile undertaking, while relating them to the life of the reader makes the writings vivid and enhances trust.

Questionnaires, personal interviews, and observations have been used to evaluate the success of the method. The general response is that learning the writings in a manner which relates to one's personal life makes it easier to relate trustfully to all the participants in the discussion. Discussions in smaller groups about problems which will later be discussed in the larger group also contribute to the enhancement of trust. Most

participants also stressed the leader's general approach as a major factor -- if he or she relates openly, authentically, and trustfully to the writings and to the participants, trust will emerge.

Thus, a Buberian Learning Group differs both from a conventional classroom and from a "group dynamics" group. Participants sit in a circle with the leader who often brings personal examples to help clarify the text being discussed. This sharing of experiences on the part of the leader is a first step to creating an atmosphere of dialogue in the group. The Buberian Learning Group differs from a "group dynamics" group in that the discussion does not center around the feelings of the participants -- they are told clearly and emphatically that their feelings concern the group only as a component of the existential relations discussed.

The leader of a Buberian Learning Group must be well versed in existentialist writings and in Buber's philosophy. He or she must also have attained, as a person, the fourth stage in the scale of development based on Buber's writings. (See Appendix). In short, the leader must be able to relate dialogically while working for the realization of a just vision of human relations.

THE METHOD

Three types of existentialist writings were used: philosophical essays, short stories and parables, existentialist novels. In this paper the method of teaching philosophical essays and short stories or parables so as to enhance trust will be described. It should be noted that during the discussion of an essay the leader will at times present a parable or story to clarify a philosophical point, and during the discussion of a story the leader may interject a philosophical citation. Thus the following distinction between the essay and the story relates to the specific text which serves as the basis of the discussion.

The Philosophical Essay

A philosophical essay is often the best introduction to a series of concepts which, when realized, lead to the development of trust between persons. The students read the essay aloud in class and the leader makes sure that they understand Buber's textual clarifications (Martin Buber was very sensitive to exact clarification of concepts). After reading a few pages, the leader introduces an exercise or topic for discussion which leads to guided introspection as to the difficulties each person has in realizing Buber's approach. The leader helps make these difficulties poignant, and then suggests a Buberian response, which is often based on personal experience.

The first meeting of a Buberian Learning Group is dedicated to letting participants get to know each other and to some general remarks on existentialism, and trust. The next six weeks are devoted to reading and to discussing Martin Buber's "Elements of the Interhuman" (Buber, 1965:72-88). In the second meeting the first section of Buber's essay is read and explained. Participants will begin to grasp the difference between the social and the interhuman. Some may suddenly perceive that, for the most part, they have been living in the social: as individuals who are members of a social milieu, they have ignored the realm of the interhuman, which is the building of dialogical relations with other persons. Such can be a rare but significant moment of personal enlightment. In one of the groups the leader used the following lines from Buber's essay as the basis of an exercise.

> The realm of the interhuman goes far beyond that of sympathy. Such simple

> happenings can be part of it as, for instance, when two strangers exchange glances in a crowded streetcar, at once to sink back into the convenient state of wishing to know nothing about each other. But also every casual encounter between opponents belongs to this realm, when it affects the opponent's attitude -- that is when something, however imperceptible, happens between the two, no matter whether it is marked at the time by any feeling or not. The only thing that matters is that for each of the two men the other happens as the particular other, that each becomes aware of the other and is thus related to him in such a way that he does not regard and use him as an object, but as his partner in a living event, even if it is no more than a boxing match. (Buber, 1965:74).

In the exercise the group was divided into Jewish-Arab dyads; each participant was told to share with his or her partner the difficulties one has in relating to members of the other ethnic group as a "particular other...as a partner in a living event." In such exercises the answer to the question is frequently less important than the process of self education initiated by the posing of such a question. Such was evident in the discussion that summarized the exercise. Here are some excerpts. (The leader is a Jew. Names in all examples are fictitious).

Leader. What were your difficulties, Muhammed?

Muhammed. My difficulty stems from the fact that I feel that most Jews suspect me.

Leader. Those are not your personal difficulties. Do you accept Jews as "a partner in a living event?

Muhammed. Well, no, I am always wondering what he thinks about me.

Leader. Explain.

Muhammed. Whenever I talk to a Jew, I look at his eyes and try and hear in his words what he thinks about Arabs, about Palestinians.

Leader. I hope you understand that by such behavior you are making yourself an object and not a partner in a living event. In that case you are responsible for lack of dialogue and trust between you and the Jews you meet.

Muhammed (angrily). Leave me alone. you don't understand me and all you want to do is to prove Buber's point. Even you probably suspect me.

Kasem (Arab man). Your response is out of order, Muhammed.

Leader. I agree, Kasem. Now, Muhammed, listen. Believe me your anger will not solve much except giving vent to your feelings. I do not suspect you. I trust you. I am willing to accept you as a partner in a living event. I want to prove Buber's points because that is the only way I know of that we will be able to build trust between us. But I will not identify with your painful feelings or with your suspicions. I reject your suspicions of me and of many other Jews, including those sitting here. And I suggest that you stop taking your feelings so seriously. Let's turn to someone else.

Dana (Jewish woman). Something is bothering me in this entire discussion.

Leader. What?

Dana. Why don't you want to identify with Muhammed's feelings or with my feelings or with anyone else's feelings? Why don't you try and check into the psychological reasons for Muhammed's feelings? Only then can you help him overcome those feelings.

Leader. This question is central to what we are doing here, and I'd like to make three points

in response. First, we are not a T group. We are not dealing with group therapy. I am trying to show you what you must do to live trustfully, but I am not a therapist who will help you cope with psychological problems. I will say that if you learn to live trustfully then often some of the problems which are rooted in distorted feelings may evaporate. But even if not, that is not my cup of tea. Second, dialogue, as Buber taught it is not identifying with the other, but rather accepting him as other while often rejecting his feelings or thoughts. I attempted to relate dialogically to Muhammed. I would also like to add that I *am* interested in your feelings, but only as part of your entire way of life, and not as a main topic for discussion. The entire situation here reminds me of a short story that Martin Buber was fond of quoting. Let me read you the story as told by Jaacob Yitzchak in Buber's book *For the Sake of Heaven* (1962; 32).

> "My second story," said Jaacob Yitzchak, "is even briefer and more concise than the first. Its title is: 'How I Apprenticed Myself to a Peasant.' ...after I left Apt and had set out on my journeying, I came upon a huge hay wagon which had been overturned and blocked the road diagonally. The peasant who stood beside it called out to me, begging me to help him lift up the wagon. Truly my arms are not without strength, and the peasant seemed quite a man, too. But how were two men to lift up that enormous weight? 'I cannot do it,' I said. The other snarled at me. 'You can,' he cried, 'but you're not willing.' That struck me to the heart. We had some boards; we inserted them under the wagon and used all our strength in this act of leverage. The wagon stirred and rose and stood. We piled the hay on it again. The peasant passed his hand over the sides of the oxen who still trembled and panted. They began to draw. 'Let me walk along with you awhile,' I said. 'Come right along, brother,' he answered. We trod along together. 'I would like to ask you something,' I said. 'Ask all you like, brother,' he answered. 'How did you happen to think,' I asked him, 'that I was unwilling to help?' 'I thought of that,' he replied, 'because you said you could not help. No one knows whether he can do a thing until he has tried it.' "

Leader. My role is the role of the peasant. Like the overturned hay wagon we have this problem of existential mistrust between us Jews and Arabs, which you doubt we can lift together. I know that we can lift it if you only lend all your strength and do not speculate about the problem or indulge in your feelings about it. So let us heave together.

In this discussion the leader had to steer carefully between the Scylla of indulging in feelings and the Charybdis of mistrust in order to reach the straightforwardness of Buberian dialogue. The telling of a story shifted the discussion from the feelings of the students and from methodological clarifications to a level of learning and listening -- listening to a story will often open the participant to the possibilities suggested in the philosophical text. In the discussion the leader strove to fulfill the approach described in the text, that the interhuman goes far beyond sympathy. Straightforwardly and dialogically Muhammed was told that his feelings will not arouse empathy since they contribute to his existential mistrust of Jews. The leader then added that it is possible to relate differently, trustfully, to other persons.

At the beginning of the second semester, Buber's essay "Guilt and Guilt Feelings" (Buber, 1965:121-148), is read. The first meeting is usually dedicated to explaining the difference between guilt and guilt feelings; a person can be guilty without experiencing guilt feelings -- Eichmann in his trial in Jerusalem is a well published example -- and conversely, a person can experience guilt feelings without being guilty -- psychoanalytical literature abounds in examples of this phenomenon. At the next meeting the students are taught to relate to their guilt; the following section of the text is read and clarified:

> A man stands before us who through acting or failing to act, has burdened himself with a guilt or has taken part in a community guilt, and now, after years or decades is again and again visited by the memory of his guilt. Nothing of the genesis of his illness is concealed from him if he is only willing no longer to conceal from himself the guilt character of that active or passive occurrence. What takes possession of him ever again has nothing to do with any parental or social reprimand, and if he does not have to fear an earthly retribution and does not believe in a heavenly one, no court, no punishing power exists that can make him anxious. Here rules the one penetrating insight — the one insight capable of penetrating into the impossibility of recovering the original point of departure and the irreparability of what has been done, and that means the real insight into the irreversibility of lived time, a fact that shows itself in the starkest of human perspectives, that concerning one's own death. From no standpoint is time perceived so like a torrent as from the vision of the self in guilt. Swept along in this torrent, the bearer of guilt is visited by the shudder of identity with himself. I, he comes to know, I, who have become another, am the same (Buber, 1965:125-6).

According to Buber, the act of illuminating one's guilt is the first step in a three-step process of coping with guilt. The second step is the continual accepting of oneself as the person who incurred a specific guilt, even if time has passed since one became guilty. In the third step the guilty person must endeavor

> ...in his place and according to his capacity, in the given historical and biographical situations, to restore the order-of-being injured by him through the relation of an active devotion to the world — for the wounds of the order-of-being can be healed in infinitely many other places than those at which they were inflicted (Buber, 1965:136).

In one group the leader explained that a person can incur guilt by refusing to see the development of certain historical processes, or when seeing such a development by refusing to take a stance. A superficial approach to one's heritage is an instance in which many persons incur guilt. The leader continued: "If we are true with ourselves we will admit that we are living with superficial approaches to both the Jewish and the Arab heritages. We accept the fact that one's relation to one's heritage is expressed in fanatical outbursts, or in uncritical adherence to some unexplainable tenets, or in a "schmaltzy" feeling. Such an approach does not have an impact on a person's basic relations with other persons or with God." Each participant was then asked to note areas of specific guilt in relation to this process. Here are some excerpts:

Dina (Jewish woman). I get what you're saying about our relation to our heritage, but I really don't feel guilty if I have a sort of "schmaltzy" feeling towards Jewish songs or holidays. You seem to be destroying something positive in me without offering an alternative.

Leader. An alternative? Yes, you are right I did not make it clear. The alternative is to make your relation to your heritage a component of your daily life. For instance, you are a teacher, Dina. In your encounters with your pupils your relation to Judaism must be expressed. Not necessarily by outward admonitions or speeches; it must be expressed in your daily acts, in the way you refer to that heritage, mention it, learn from it, live it.

Dina. But I do not know what my relation to Judaism is.

Leader. Then your coping with establishing a relation should be expressed in your daily encounters.

Dina. That sounds a bit abstract, I'll think about it. But wait. I have another question. What does all this have to do with education for peace and the developing of trust? We seem to have strayed today a long way from our goal.

Sausan (Arab woman). I think Dina is right. I don't know where all this is leading us in relation to education for peace. My heritage is not very open towards women and does not attract me in my search for freedom of expression. At times I want to forget about my relation to my heritage. But even if I remember my relation to Islam and cope with it, how will I come closer to reaching peaceful relations with Jews, to developing trust? Where does all this lead?

Leader. I am not sure that I can make the connection clear, but let me try. We all know that Jews have incurred guilt towards Arabs, and Arabs towards Jews. We are all guilty. In order to cope with such guilt a person must know where he stands, he must be anchored in a milieu or in his heritage. Most of us here are not anchored in the rigid way of life of Orthodox Judaism or Islam. We are also very uncomfortable in the superficiality of the surrounding milieu which views the Jewish-Arab situation merely in terms of power politics and ignores any profound relationship to one's heritage. So, I believe that we must build a relation to our own heritage and on the basis of that relation cope with the wrong relations between Jews and Arabs... I see by your faces that what I am saying seems abstract... let me think a moment... well, all I can add is that our situation reminds me of the fantasy Sartre had, which he describes in his autobiography *The Words*. In the fantasy, the teenager Sartre has stolen onto a train to Dijon without a ticket and broke. The conductor catches him and wants to put him off at the next station. Sartre tries to explain to the conductor that he must reach Dijon; all of France and the entire world rely on his fullfilling his mission in Dijon. Otherwise something terrible will happen. He entreats and explains, but the conductor seems firm. As expected, Sartre wakes up without knowing the outcome of his endeavors. My view is that we all lack that ticket to stay on the train leading to our Dijon. And we can only get the ticket -- not by explaining our importance -- but by relating to our heritage. And without that ticket I am not sure that we will be able to develop the relation of active devotion to the world that Buber mentions (Sartre, 1964:69-70).

The Short Story

Existentialist writing is rather scarce in the Arab world, but there are a few excellent stories and novels by Naguib Mahfouz which pose existentialist themes. Two other Arab authors whose works have been taught are Yusuf Idris and Tayeb Salih. Probably Mahfouz' best existentialist piece is his short story "Zaabalawi," which is read at the end of the first semester.

Sheikh Zaabalawi is the name of a holy man for whom the narrator of the story is searching. He remembers his father describing Zaabalawi thus: "May his blessing descend upon you, he's a true saint of God, a remover of worries and troubles. Were it not for him I would have died miserably" (Mahfouz, 1967:135). When the narrator reached a point in his life where he was afflicted with an illness for which no one possessed a remedy he decided to search out Sheikh Zaabalawi. The story is a description of his relentless search through the richness and the backalleys of Cairo. Everywhere Zaabalawi is blessed by those who met him and sensed his holiness, but his whereabouts remain unknown. Finally the narrator is given a tip: A Mr. Wanas al-Damanhouri who frequents the Negma Bar often meets with Zaabalawi. He finds the bar, but the intoxicated Mr. Wanas stubbornly refuses to talk to anyone who is not drunk. After some hesitation the narrator begins drinking:

...He filled my glass for the second time. I glanced at it in trepidation; then overcoming my innate objection I drank it down at a gulp. No sooner had it come to rest inside me than I lost all will-power. With the third glass I lost my memory and with the fourth the future vanished... I don't know how long it was before my head sank down onto the arm of the chair and I plunged into a deep sleep. During it I had a beautiful dream the like of which I had never experienced... I was in an immense garden surrounded on all sides by luxuriant trees and the sky was nothing but stars seen between entwined branches, all enfolded in an atmosphere like that of sunset or a sky overcast with cloud. I was lying on a small hummock of jasmine petals which fell upon me like rain, while the lucent spray of a fountain unceasingly sprinkled my head and temples. I was in a state of deep contentedness, of ecstatic serenity. An orchestra of warbling and cooing played in my ear. There was an extraordinary sense of harmony between me and my inner self, and between the two of us and the world, everything being in its rightful place without discord or distortion. In the whole world there was no single reason for speech or movement for the universe moved in a rapture of ecstasy... When I opened my eyes consciousness struck at me like a policeman's fist and I saw Wanas al-Damanhouri regarding me with concern. In the bar only a few drowsy people were left.

'You have slept deeply,' said my companion; 'you were obviously hungry for sleep.'

I rested my heavy head in the palms of my hands. When I took them away in astonishment and looked down at them, I found that they glistened with drops of water.

'My head's wet,' I protested.

'Yes, my friend tried to rouse you,' he answered quietly.

'Somebody saw me in this state?'

'Don't worry, he is a good man. Have you not heard of Sheikh Zaabalawi?'

'Zaabalawi!' I exclaimed, jumping to my feet.

'Yes,' he answered in surprise. 'What is wrong?'

'Where is he?'

'I don't know where he is now. He was here and then he left.'

I was about to run off in pursuit but found I was more exhausted than I had imagined. Collapsed over the table, I cried out in despair:

'My sole reason for coming to you was to meet him. Help me to catch up with him or send someone after him' (Mahfouz, 1967:143-4).

The story ends without the narrator meeting Sheikh Zaabalawi, but he decides to continue his search.

In the exercise following the reading participants are asked to explain how the story, and especially the climatic meeting with Zaabalawi, reflects Arab existence and society. They are encouraged to talk about themselves. Some Arabs suddenly discover that they are searching for a Zaabalawi who will heal their afflictions, be they personal, social, or national. Here are excerpts from one such a discussion:

Hassan (Arab man). There is something pushy about making us relate the story solely to Arab society. Aren't there Jews who search for Zaabalawi and become intoxicated and lose their sense of direction in the process?

Leader. Who said there aren't Jews who search for Zaabalawi? There are. But if Naguib Mahfouz is today recognized as the greatest living Arab author, then he has something very personal to say to you, Hassan. If you get that message you will have learned something significant about yourself.

Hassan. I don't get any personal message from the story.

Leader. Come on. As usual you are trying to make life easy for yourself. Let us take a personal problem you brought up in a recent workshop: The fact that your parents want to decide who you will marry, and that they even have chosen a wife for you. You are not happy with the choice, yet you do not confront your parents directly. Instead, you try and keep away from home and stay here and study; you do get good grades for your troubles, but you are also evading the issue and hoping for a way out by some miracle. You told us all this three weeks ago. Isn't that a sort of search for Zaabalawi?

Hassan. You know, you are right. In my fantasies I often imagine my great grandfather, whom I knew as a child, appearing in my father's dream and annulling their choice.

Mahmoud (Arab man). But what does the search for Zaabalawi have to do with Arab society? I married a woman whom I chose and did not submit to my parents' pressure. I am not sure that the story relates to me.

Nira (Jewish woman). I think I know. Many Israeli Arabs here are constantly talking of a Palestinian State as a way out of your problems. It may be a way out but your search is not constructive. The Palestinians seem to be waiting for the world to give them their state on a silver platter, and thus all their afflictions will be healed. Well, I got news for you -- that is searching for Zaabalawi. Because building a society or a state is a constructive effort and not a search for a miracle panacea to an affliction.

Mahmoud. You don't know what you are talking about.

Leader. I think Nira is right. But we can phrase it more acceptably. The current structure of Arab society does not encourage constructive grass root efforts which could bring about change; moreover, many movements within Arab society seek to heal afflictions by a miraculous leap. Nasser's speeches appealed to this current of Arab life; Ayatolla Houmeini uses similar tactics in intoxicating his followers with fanatic Islam. -- I know he is not an Arab. But both leaders could never have succeeded if the search for Zaabalawi was not fundamental to Arab and much Moslem existence.

It is important to emphasize that such a discussion can only occur after some months in a Buberian Learning Group, that is, after trust has been partially established.

Franz Kafka's "The Great Wall of China" is a short story which serves as the basis of a workshop at the beginning of the second semester. Participants are told to carefully read the two parables which appear in the story and to explain in the workshop how these parables express their own life. Here are both parables:

> Consider rather the river in spring. It rises until it grows mightier and nourishes more richly the soil on long stretches of its banks, still maintaining its own course until it reaches the sea, where it is all the more welcome because it is a worthier ally. Thus far may you urge your meditations on the decrees of the high command. But after the river overflows its banks, loses outline and shape, slows

down the speed of its current, tries to ignore its destiny by forming little seas in the interior of the land, damages the fields, and yet cannot maintain itself for long in its new expanse, but must run back between its banks again, must even dry up wretchedly in the hot season that follows. Thus far you may not urge your meditations on the decrees of the high command (Kafka, 1946:240).

There is a parable that describes this situation very well: The Emperor, so it runs, has sent a message to you, the humble subject, the insignificant shadow cowering in the remotest distance before the imperial sun; the Emperor from his deathbed has sent a message to you alone. He has commanded the messenger to kneel down by the bed, and has whispered the message to him; so much store did he lay on it that he ordered the messenger to whisper it back into his ear again. Then by a nod of the head he has confirmed that it is right. Yes, before the assembled spectators of his death -- all the obstructing walls have been broken down, and on the spacious and loftily mounting open staircases stand in a ring the great princes of the Empire -- before all these he has delivered his message. The messenger immediately sets out on his journey; a powerful and indefatigable man; now pushing with his right arm, now with his left, he cleaves a way for himself through the throng; if he encounters resistance he points to his breast, where the symbol of the sun glitters; the way is made easier for him than it would be for any other man. But the multitudes are so vast; their numbers have no end. If he could reach the open fields how fast he would fly, and soon doubtless you would hear the welcome hammering of his fists upon your door. But instead how vainly does he wear out his strength; still he is only making his way through the chambers of the innermost palace; never will he get to the end of them; and if he succeeded in that nothing would be gained; he must next fight his way down the stair; and if he succeeded in that nothing would be gained; the courts would have to be crossed; and after the courts the second outer palace; and once more stairs and courts; and once more another palace; and so on for thousands of years; and if at last he should burst through the outermost gate -- but never, never can that happen -- the imperial capital would lie before him, the center of the world, crammed to bursting with its own sediment. Nobody could fight his way through here even with a message from a dead man. But you sit at your window when evening falls and dream it to yourself (Kafka, 1946:244).

The workshop centered around these two parables focuses on each participant for about thirty minutes. Here is an excerpt from one such workshop:

Dany (Jewish man). The only one I can relate to in both parables is the messenger who keeps trying to bring the message but is stuck in the middle of the way.

Leader. Why? Why can't you relate to other aspects of the parables?

Dany. Because I don't find anything that appeals to me in them. You seem to be trying to push me into a way of looking at my life that accords with your philosophy.

Leader. I don't think you are right, but...

Dany (Interrupting). Let me finish. I think that one of the shortcomings of this entire course is that everyone here agrees with you about the parables, but later they say that it is all bullshit. And besides....

Leader (raising his voice). Shut up a minute, Dany. Look, we are not discussing the course. Do you want to explain why you feel you are the messenger and why you cannot relate to other aspects of the parables? Yes or no?

Dany. Not now after you shut me up.

Leader. O.K. then, let's go on to someone else.

Fatma (Arab woman). I want to say something. Dany, I don't agree at all with your generalizations. I, for one, have often been angry at what occurred here, but I never said it was bullshit. Really, its about time you learned to speak for yourself and about yourself. Now to me. I am not quite sure how the parable about the river relates to my own life. Perhaps through the fact that I always attempt to flow slowly and evenly.

Leader. What do you mean by that?

Fatma. Just what I said. That I try to keep my life even and unsurging. I don't want it to expand beyond its accepted borders.

Leader . Give us an example.

Fatma. Well ... like my studies. I always choose the courses which do not demand too much of me.

Leader. Your example is superficial, and besides, why did you choose this course. I don't think we've been flowing easily here.

Fatma (smilingly). If you know everything why don't you tell me about myself and the parable?

Leader. You are again evading responsibility. Why don't you at least try to understand how your life is flowing. I accept your assertion that you do not extend beyond fixed borders; but I would have mentioned the fact that as an Arab woman you begrudgingly accept your degraded second class status in Arab society. Here and there you try to acquire some freedom which does not fit in with the dictates of the high command, but in general you accept your destiny. I suspect that you fear any overflowing in this direction, perhaps because you fear being misjudged and alone, perhaps because you fear your passions.

Fatma. You may be right, but what confuses me about this entire exercise is that you give an analysis but do not suggest a solution. You leave me aground with some new insight about myself but no way to change my existential situation, as you call it.

Leader. I agree that I don't give solutions. But I believe that many of the solutions are there if we are willing to undergo the difficult process of self-education, and if we are willing to suffer the pain involved in challenging the encompassing milieu. You see, Fatma, you are now acting like the person in the second parable who is sitting by the window and waiting for the messenger from the Emperor to arrive. Well, as Kafka suggests, he will never arrive, and waiting for him is just a fantasy. And in general, our impotence to change our life exists because we allow it to exist. You fear you have much to lose by challenging your position as an Arab woman, so you stay put.

Fatma (quietly). You know why I remained in this course even though it doesn't flow easily. Because I learned that when I hate what you are saying, I feel that you really love me, and that I have what to learn from you.

Leader. Thanks, Fatma. I do love you now... Let's all take a break.

Rarely do discussions end with such an upsurge of trust and love. One must remember that this discussion took place after five months of intensive work in a Buberian Learning Group.

CONCLUSIONS

Five points should be stressed concerning the learning of existentialist writings in order to enhance trust. *First*, such a studying of existentialist writings can encourage persons to reach a level of profundity in human relations only infrequently reached in the classroom setting or the group dynamics group. (It may be possible to also use classical writings, i.e. Shakespeare; this needs to be checked.) Persons learn to see their life and existential situation as a process which can be changed, and for which they are responsible. They learn to share existential problems and through sharing, to trust the other. *Second*, the leader's role is crucial. He or she must relate dialogically, and be able to lead participants to change their existential situation. Often such a dialogue leads to direct and painful confrontations, which in turn can be used by the leader to clarify literature and to enhance trust. *Third*, although the leader is crucial, the group also assists in creating trust. *Fourth*, the partial success of our method bears witness to the basic need for dialogue and trust among all involved. Many persons find the process opening new realms of existence, and with that a better understanding of themselves and of literature. And *fifth*, the manner by which trust arises by this and other methods used in a Buberian Learning Group needs further explanation and evaluation.

And finally, one hopes to have shown that the following citation from Buber underlies the educational approach described in this paper.

> Contact is the primary word of education. It means that the teacher shall face his pupils not as developed brain before unfinished ones, but as being before beings, as mature being before developing beings. He must really face them, that means not in a direction working from above to below, from the teacher's chair to the pupils' benches, but in genuine interaction, in exchange of experiences, experiences of a fulfilled life with those of still unfulfilled ones. But the latter experiences are no less important than the former. For what is needed is not mere seeking for information from above, also not mere questions from here and answers from there, but genuine dialogue. The teacher, to be sure, conducts and governs this dialogue, but even so he must also enter it with his own person, directly and candidly. This dialogue shall continue into silent being with one another, indeed undoubtedly only here will it properly culminate. It is this which I call the dialogical principle in education (Buber, 1967:102)

FOOTNOTES

1. For a broader discussion of existential mistrust see Gordon (1980:292-295).
2. Most of the information on Jewish-Arab groups was supplied by Mr. Rasmi Biadsi who for five years and during the reign of three Israeli prime ministers served in the Prime Minister's office as Deputy Officer in Charge of Arab Affairs. His duties included documenting all groups for Jewish-Arab understanding which had been established. For studies on Jewish-Arab relations see Levi and Benjamin (1976; 1977).
3. Participants who were students received course credit for participation in a Buberian Learning Group.

APPENDIX

The following is a condensation of the scale of development which was published in *Teachers College Record* (Gordon, 1980). It describes some of the educational goals of a Buberian Learning Group: To guide a person to rise in the scale of development. As mentioned above, a leader should be at the fourth stage.

Scale of Development from the Impression-Making Person to the Dialogical Educator

The ensuing five modes of existence and manners of relating to the world are based on concepts coined by Martin Buber. The steps in the scale describe stages in the development of a person from the impression-making stage, which is quite common in Western society, up to the dialogical educator.

It should be kept in mind that according to Buber, Nietzsche, Dostoyevsky, and other existentialists a person develops and realizes his or her personality through relations to the Other, to the It, to the Thou. One must therefore not confuse the following stages with the approach developed by various psychologists (Freud, Maslow) who begin with a description of the structure of a person's psyche and find in that structure, and not in the manner in which a person relates, the source for personality develoment.

In a person's life the stages often blend. For reasons of clarity they have been presented separately. It is highly improbable that persons in higher stages can fully free themselves from some remnants of lower stages.

First Stage: The Impression-Making Person. The person is primarily concerned with the impressions he or she makes on other people and generally relates to the other as an object and to nature as an It. The person imposes on the other, often uses stereotypes, does not speak straightforwardly, and evades personal responsibility. The person is very much affected by public opinion and often lives in bad faith.

Second Stage: The Conscious Person. The person distinguishes between seeming (impression making) and being, and between relating to the Other as an object and as a subject; he or she is conscious of the possibility of relating personally to nature. The person is aware of the faults of imposing oneself on the Other, is aware of his or her moments of bad faith, is willing to describe personal failings to another person and begins to doubt stereotypes. The person expresses interest in self-education, wonders if his or her potential is being fulfilled, and begins to be aware of the importance of personal responsibility.

Third Stage: The Person Who Educates Himself or Herself to Relate Dialogically. The person learns to listen to the Other, attempts to relate to the Other subjectively, to trust him or her, and to be aware of his or her otherness. The person makes first attempts to live in accordance with one's being, allows oneself to be spontaneous, rebels against stereotypes and refrains from imposing oneself on the Other. The person speaks straightforwardly and begins to establish a relationship of communion with nature. The person is aware of one's freedom and destructive tendencies and is constantly seeking new ways to realize his or her being.

Fourth Stage: The Dialogical Person. The person can develop a genuine dialogue and make oneself present to the Other; he or she is open to the Thou, and allows moments of I-Thou relationships to guide one's life. The person responds trustfully to the Other, accepts responsibility, and knows how to support the Other lovingly. The person seeks ways of

directing one's destructive tendencies to constructive channels and expresses one's freedom creatively. The person seeks for a vision of just human relationships.

Fifth Stage: The Dialogical Educator. The person has a definite direction for personal development and is responsible for the fulfillment of a vision of humanity. The person sees the Other, that is, his or her strengths and existential situation , and is willing to teach the Other to realize one's personality in light of the vision of humanity. The dialogical educator is willing to bring suffering to the Other, knowing that at times there is no other way to help the Other develop one's creative powers; yet he or she remains sensitive to the suffering and to the pain that the Other undergoes. The dialogical educator trusts other persons and the world, listens to the demands of the world, and relates as a whole being to his or her pupils.

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