

## Learnings for Organizations from the Bedouins and the Druze

### How my Story Started

While my Bedouin guide Baja and I were hiking in the northern Israeli desert he asked me what kind of work I did. Walking several paces behind him, I delivered a long tutorial about my work in consulting, leadership training, Systems Thinking and Dialogue. I continued in full presentation mode, with stories and examples, pausing for breath only as we climbed higher up the rock ledges.

Baja turned around and said, "I don't understand, why you have to *teach* these skills to people; if you live in the desert, you understand Systems Thinking in order to survive. Dialogue is the way we hold our important conversations. Come back and I will take you to meet some of the wise men to hear stories for yourself." This was my chance to move beyond academia and theory and to experience firsthand Dialogue among native peoples.

I went back, numerous times. Men and women told me stories. I took an accomplished Belgian photographer with me make portraits the wise men and women. Each time I stayed in the Bedouin village Malame and traveled either with Baja or Morris, an Israeli naturalist. Morris spoke fluent Bedouin Arabic, and was well known and respected in the north of Israel. He had raised his family there, and with the help of Druze and Bedouin friends had successfully managed a farm, and raised cattle. Morris has written a naturalist book about the north of Israel beautifully illustrated (Hebrew details in ppt photos).

Morris was as interested as I was in the stories and wisdom of the elders. With his network of connections we were able to listen to stories from Bedouins in villages, in distant isolated homes, in tents far out in the desert; from Druze Sheiks in their homes, from a Christian Palestinian in his home (a multicultural peace center), and in a school attended by Druze, Bedouin, Arab Israeli and Israeli children. The native cultures of these story tellers are very different. What they have in common is their love for this stunningly beautiful region, a microcosm of geography, mountains, sea, desert, fertile land, and a desire to continue the traditions of living in harmony with each other.

There is a hierarchy of the Bedouins tribes in Israel; there are three distinctly different groups. The first (and lowest in hierarchy) are those who live near the roads and make a living from tourists; providing photo opportunities, selling souvenirs, and stealing from the tourists' parked cars. The second are migratory Bedouins who live in tent communities deep in the desert and exist by herding camels, sheep and goats. The third group lives in villages, with the most of the men serving in the Israeli army, others teaching, farming or raising sheep and goats. Within each of these groups there numerous tribes. Inter-marriage among tribes is now more common. Awareness of

genetic issues, like the heart problems in Malame, has led the young people to purposefully marry outside their immediate families.

The Druze appear to have a more westernized culture than the Bedouins. They live in villages, and many men serve in senior officer roles in the Israel army. There is a more private culture; they never marry outside their religion. Their actual beliefs and places of worship remain secret from outsiders. It was through Morris' friendship that I was invited into the Druze home, and welcomed with generous hospitality.

In the area the Druze command a higher level of respect than the Bedouins. The Bedouins' reputation suffers from the common interfaces of outsiders with those Bedouins who sell souvenirs and break into hikers' cars. The Druze are regarded with respect, not only in the north of Israel, but throughout the Middle East. For example, the Syrians allow the Druze of the Golan Heights to cross the border into Syria for major occasions like marriages. The Druze and Bedouins do not have much respect for the currently defined political boundaries in the area. They recognize tribal areas and were accustomed to moving across borders without concern for country definitions. The Golan Heights is an example of where their families live close to one another but in different conflicted nations.

My focus was on learning about the actual processes of dialogue and decision making: how the leaders facilitated the meetings and how the dialogue process manifested itself in daily life, in group conversations, decision making, and in the rituals of resolution. I learned the ways of interacting and deep listening were not compartmentalized –the interviewing rituals for arranging a marriage were the same as those for resolving conflict.

My plan for the research and interviews about the facilitation, inquiry and dialogue processes was challenging. Beja and Morris provided not only introductions and translations, but the invaluable link explaining why I was there and asking questions. I was concerned about appearing as a voyeuristic tourist intrusively curious about interpersonal practices of very private people. At the time I was consulting for a European organization, so I showed photographs of the organization's teams explained that these people came from different countries, (like different tribes), met together to decide rules for the airplanes that flew over all the countries' (tribes) territories. The Bedouins did not recognize the names of the countries but living as they did at the intersections of Syria, Jordan, Lebanon in the midst of Israelis, Israeli Arabs, Druze, Christian Palestinians and multiple Bedouin tribes, they knew that it was difficult for people of different tribes to reach decisions. And, of course they had seen many airplanes and understood that it was important that there be agreement about where they flew. The idea that it was necessary for me to help people make decisions together appeared to be strange, but, thanks to the guides; somehow comprehensible.

I explained that I wanted to learn from them how they managed agreements, both in times of conflict and normal governance. I explained my belief that we in Europe could learn much from the way that the Bedouin and Druze wise men managed groups of people as they reached agreements... This explanation seemed satisfactory, but it was the trust and friendship with my guides that led the wise elders to tell me stories.

When doing the interview, I stayed in Malame experiencing the daily life of the village as I listened to the stories from the leaders and the wise men who traveled to meet with me there. From that base I traveled to Bedouin tent communities and Druze villages.

### **Daily Life in a Bedouin Community**

Within the Bedouin village, there is the extended family centric view, with the explicit and voiced vision that life is to be lived to provide a better world for the children of the community. Everyone takes responsibility for the children. An individual is defined by their relationships – usually in relationship to the village chief (I am the aunt, sister, niece of Dyan). Malame is a village that could come from a beautiful, fairy tale picture book: peacocks, fragrant flowering blush t pink almond trees, perfect oranges and lemons eaten from the trees and brightly colored vegetable gardens. Dyan explains that everything his family eats they have grown or raised themselves. The fresh picked fruit and vegetables, cured olives, warm freshly baked pita bread made three times a day, goat cheeses and un-ending varieties of wonderful Bedouin delicacies (one favorite was the dish with tiny vegetables stuffed inside each other like Russian Kachinka dolls. My visit was a gourmet idyll with meals and conversations melting into each other throughout the days and evenings. We lounged on cushions in the sun, ate, talked, napped, ate again; time was marked only by the Mullah's song. The low table in front of us was the center of our universe; people, food and stories flowed around us. A baby goat wandered up, chewed on fingers, a Jewish couple came by to purchase young olive trees, joined the conversation, stayed for tea, people from the village came in and out of the conversation, some brought back others with stories or questions.

Children were ever present, all ages; with a hierarchy of care giving; the youngest were watched by the next oldest, young children were carrying around toddlers only slightly smaller than they themselves. Babies were always in someone's arms and were handed around with freely. I received both a baby goat and a young child and each nestled comfortably in my arms.

Children are raised by the entire village and it is a large extended family. Most people are from the same tribe and intermarriage among cousins is normal. Education for the young people is of primary importance. The village school master proudly gave me a tour of the excellent school well equipped with modern computers. Teaching is a highly respected. Every day, Anna, Dyan's daughter in laws, walks with her small baby on her hip an hour each way to the nearest university to study for her teaching diploma.

There is a high level of intimacy among the women in the village. Initially, to my surprise and embarrassment, I was sometimes included in this circle. required discretion as Farar, the wife of the oldest man in the village 101 year old Arja, boasted that her husband was very young and strong, explaining that he trimmed the olive trees in the orchard every day, and, ---if it were not for the fact that she could no longer produce babies;, they would still be having children. From her twinkling expression and Morris' somewhat hesitant translation, I could tell that she had explicitly described Arja's virility.

When I arrived for a second visit, the women of Dyan's family came into my room and settled themselves onto my bed. Using universal grade school sign language they asked me if I were sleeping with Alan the photographer who had accompanied me. Taken aback, I said no, reminded them that I had a husband and, as on previous trips, showed them his photograph. They dismissed this with a shrug and the equivalent of "so? ".

In spite of the binding family and tribal relationships, the reputed Bedouin hospitality to strangers was omnipresent. One day as Alan and I strolled around the village we found ourselves the object of curiosity and attention. People insistently waved to us to come into their homes. Not wanting to be rude, we accepted one family's invitation.

As we were all seated inside drinking the ubiquitous orange drink, the family, speaking in Hebrew, welcomed us and asked us to stay for dinner. They assumed that if we were strangers walking around the village we must be Israeli hikers. Suddenly we all realized that we had no common language. This was surprising for our hosts, but was dismissed as not a problem.

I had not met this family and they had no idea who we were, where we came from or why we were walking around in Malame. They became more and more insistent and pantomimed that we must stay and share a meal with them. Sharing a meal was a welcoming ritual and to refuse we knew would have been major breach of respect. Eventually I found enough Arabic words to tell them that we were guests of Dyan, and that Matima, his wife, would be very annoyed if we did not return for dinner. Not wanting to upset Matima (a very strong character herself as well as being the Village Chief's wife) was acknowledged as a good reason to for us to leave, and we promised to return another time.

In spite of manifested Western influences, the traditional rules still very much apply. As Alan and I were ending our visit and leaving, the women all hugged and kissed me. As Alan bent down to politely give a good by kiss to one of the daughters, she screamed and jumped back. Morris told us that her uncles probably would not have killed her, but it would have been a serious violation of her family's honor if Alan had kissed her.

Is the village a modern day Camelot? No, there has been shame and sorrow; there was an "honor" killing. And, when Dyan's nephew, Roam, the village musician was on army duty patrolling the Lebanese border zone a bomb thrown by a Hezbollah group

disguised as UN personnel shattered his jeep. Hezbollah claimed responsibility, but for three agonizing years refused to give information about the condition of the soldiers in the jeep. Finally Roam's body was returned and he was buried in Malame.

### **Community Decisions**

Decisions in Bedouin communities, whether within families in tents or in a modern village, are made by a committee of men. The number varies with the size of the community; an assembly of 40 led one village of 8000, another of 30 led a community of 2000. Usually the committee is composed of the heads of the families. Dyan explained that it is the 40 most important men, everyone knows who they are. Leaders evolve from within the village. Asked how one became an important man of the village, Dyan replied, "A leader has to speak well, to be tall and to be good looking."

The meetings follow after the men have shared a long traditional meal. The meeting is opened by the eldest man in the community. Arja convenes the meeting in Malame and after the meeting is officially opened, Dyan as village chief "facilitates" the meeting. The physical aspects of the meeting are those of native peoples worldwide; people sit on the ground in a circle (or now, more frequently in white plastic chairs). A topic is presented and the universal principles of dialogue are followed. Everyone is free to speak, people speak to the center of the circle; people listen deeply and actively, the group's thinking emerges as thoughts are offered into the circle. With a difficult issue the opening dialogue can last several hours.

Dyan explained that a Bedouin takes three days to make a decision. The first day, to let your mind settle, the second to talk to the women (asked if he meant also those not at the meeting; he said no, if the men are not at the meeting their opinions are not important, it was *literally*, talk to the women) the third day, to let your thoughts come together and then to meet again.

*It must not take more than three days to reach a decision.*

After a decision is reached, everyone in the village agrees to abide by it and to implement it. From this point on, the village acts "as one face".

At one village meeting three younger men were invited as guests to talk about the coming Israeli elections. Dyan recounted that after a while they walked out. Why? I asked. Because people had stopped listening to them, he answered. Trying to more deeply understand his facilitation methods, I asked *how* they knew people weren't listening, were people restless, did he intervene and cut off their presentations? He said, we (Bedouins), unlike you (Westerners) can listen intently when we are speaking; so the men knew that people had stopped listening, and knew it was time for them to leave, so, they left.

## Crime and Injury Resolution

The Sulha is a reconciliation ritual that dates from the tribal laws of the pre-Islamic era, it is an oral tradition passed down for over twenty centuries. It is currently used in the north of Israel and other Bedouin tribes and Druze communities elsewhere in Israel. The Israeli police usually respect and cooperate with the Sulha process. End Notes 1, 2

Tradition dictates that when a crime is committed, in order to escape retribution and the beginning of a cycle of injury, the father of the accused, immediately goes to a wise man and asks him to convene a *Jaha*. A Jaha is a committee of wise men; in the north of Israel, it is frequently composed of well known peacemakers from different groups, for example, a Bedouin sheik, a Druze Sheik, and a respected Arab Israeli elder. The size of the Jaha varies according the crime or injury. It is usually three men, but can be up to twenty. A Jaha is formed within twenty-four hours of a crime being committed. The designated wise men peace makers go to the home of the injured party and ask if they will accept a *hoda* or a temporary peace treaty for a specific time, usually three to six months. Frequently, there is an *atwa* or bail bond, money paid by the accused family to the offended family. These initial negotiations can be difficult and families have been known to walk out of their own homes by the back doors, rather than offend the visiting peacemakers by refusing a settlement.

An inquiry begins, with each of the respected wise men separately interviewing the accused party and his family, all witnesses, and the injured party and his family. The interviews usually involve a dinner and long conversations, for the members of the Jaha listen carefully to everyone's version of the events. The belief is that there can be no peace until every voice is heard. In the north of Israel, the Israeli police respect and cooperate with the Jaha; with the wise men's agreement or at their request, the police may hold the accused in jail for his own safety.

The Jaha meets regularly to compare interviews. After they have all interviewed everyone concerned, they determine a *diyya*, a sum of money to be paid as a penalty to the injured family. Some negotiations may take place; the money is considerable for these families, it is set in US dollars and ranges from \$ 10,000 to \$20,000. A date is then set for the Sulha, the reconciliation ritual. There will be a large gathering of witnesses, up to several thousand people, depending on the crime being settled. Issues involving more than one village will have the whole villages as witnesses. Traditionally, the father of the accused will enter the village square with a long pole and a white kaffia. He will tie the kaffia to the pole in a large knot. Next the highest-ranking sheik will tie a knot. Bedouins and Druze will travel the length of Israel for these ceremonies.

Knots are tied by all the major Sheiks and wise elders present, a minimum of five knots, and up to twenty knots. Everyone present makes a lifelong pledge to maintain a peace and reconciliation with all the terms, and to stop for generations the endless cycle of

retribution and retaliation. By tradition, the ritual insures that the eggs in the wombs of the women and the sperm in the men present are bound by the agreement. The extended families of the accused and the injured line up and shake hands. The family of the injured party offers coffee to the family of the accused person. The family and /or village of the accused offer dinner for all those present.

The symbolism and commitment to a traditional scripted reconciliation and the process itself provides many opportunities for everyone to express himself, and to be listened to by respected wise men. Everyone leaves the ritual feeling that their view has been considered and heard with great attention, that their honor and that of their family, tribe, and village has been respected.

As Dyan told me, If you revenge you lose your moral rights.

## **Stories**

### **Incident at the Olive Press**

I asked Souma and Dyan about Sulhas in their village and they told me about a recent incident in which the Sulha had been used. They said that they generally followed the tradition, but that they did it their way.

One weekend during olive harvesting season, a group of young Bedouin men from Malame took large baskets of olives over to the neighboring Israeli Arab village to use that village's olive press to press the olives into oil since there is no press in Malame.

The Bedouin men were on weekend leave from the army, (Unlike Israeli Arabs, Bedouins and Druze are allowed to serve in the Israeli army). The Bedouins were wearing their uniforms and carrying their guns, a common practice among soldiers on leave. They did so with a bit of swagger and show of bravado. Scuffling and shoving broke out as the uniformed armed Bedouins and local village men impatiently waited together in the crowded queue to use the olive press.

Suddenly a young Arab Israeli man broke out of the crowd with a knife and cut the face of one of the Bedouin men. A fight broke out among the groups of men. It was quickly broken up by the older men of the village. The attacker was hustled off to the Israeli police station and locked up in the jail.

The young Bedouins returned to Malame and began to plan revenge on the Israeli Arab village. The inhabitants of the small Israeli Arab village were terrified. They were particularly frightened for the life and safety of the young attacker. The Bedouins threatened to storm the jail and stab the attacker in retaliation. The parents of the accused immediately went to a local peacemaker, and asked him to convene a jaha.

The elders of Malame quickly stopped the young men's plans for revenge; but made their own more complicated plans for retribution. One of the victim's uncles was Souma, the "learning historian" (as I thought of him) of Malame and a retired police officer. Souma telephoned his police colleagues and asked them to come to Malame and seal off the village so the young men could not leave to go to the jail to attack the imprisoned accused man and to attack the Arab Israeli village. Souma asked his colleagues in the police to make sure the Arab Israeli village knew that the police were *trying* to restrain the men of Malame. In fact, the elders of Malame had the situation well under control and were using this tactic to terrify and intimidate the inhabitants of the Arab village.

The Sulha peace process began. A Jaha was convened; in this case, a well known and respected Arab Israeli, a Bedouin Sheik and a Druze Sheik formed the committee of inquiry. They all separately interviewed the victim, the victim's family, the accused, his family, and all the witnesses. Usually these interviews are accompanied by a meal and a two to three hour conversation. The process can take up to two years. In this case, since there was little doubt as to what had happened, the interviews were finished within two months.

The committee of wise men met and issued their verdict - the small Arab Israeli village must pay the village of Malame, \$10,000. The elders of Malame rejected this and said it was too little, they could not guarantee peace for less than \$25,000. The Arab Israeli village said they could not possibly raise \$10,000; it would be more than their total income from the olive production for the entire harvest. A series of meetings with the Jaha resulted in a compromise of diya or blood money payment of \$15,000. This was an enormous amount of money for this small village to raise.

The Israeli Arab village reluctantly agreed and the date for the Sulha ceremony was determined. Both villages came together, with the elders of the villages and high-ranking sheiks from the region. A very high ranking Bedouin sheik from the Negev in the south made the trip for the ceremony. The accused and the injured and their families were present

The father of the accused walked into the village square, carrying a long pole and a white kaffia. All who witnessed this said the man was terrified and shaking so hard that he could hardly walk. Trembling, he tied a knot in the kaffia around the pole. He pledged that he and everyone in his village would never in their lifetimes set foot in Malame. The highest ranking Bedouin Sheik tied the next knot in the kaffia around the pole; next a Druze Sheik tied a knot, then a well known Arab Israeli peacemaker, and finally a local Bedouin sheik. These respected men spoke as they made the knots committing themselves to the peace between the two villages and pledging to become involved should there be any issues.

The diya was handed over; and was accepted. Both villages lined up and shook hands.



In the traditional Sulha ritual, the accused's village invites the injured party's village for a large dinner. The invitation was issued. This time the invitation was refused with the message, "we will abide by the peace agreement, but we still don't like you and we will not share a meal with you." This was very unusual, but rituals evolve, and the symbolism of a shared meal is very important.

## **Double Murder**

Morris drove me deep into the desert to meet with a Bedouin Sheik named Ramala who lived with his two wives in a small tent complex about four kilometers from the rest of his tribe's tent compound. Morris did not know what Ramala or his family had done to be expelled from the larger community, but the crime was serious and of long standing. Ramala was happy to see us and welcomed us into his younger wife's tent, where she served us coffee. We offered our explanation about our quest for stories of decision making and dialogue, I handed around my client's photos, explaining about airplane routes decisions.

Ramala told us about the most difficult resolution process that he knew from his tribe.

In one of the tribe's tent communities there was a feud between two families. A fight broke out between the young men of the families and two men were killed, one from each family. There were two murderers and two victims.

The resolution of the conflict went to a Sulha process and a large Jaha was convened. Because of the seriousness of the crimes, the highest-ranking Bedouin sheiks were involved, as well as wise men from the Druze community. Many interviews took place, with all the witnesses and the families of both the victims. A year passed and the Jaha could not reach agreement or a settlement. The high level of tension continued within the community, the leaders were tired and frustrated and desperately wanted to move forward with a resolution.

The families and the members of the Jaha finally decided to submit the situation to the oldest and wisest man in the tribe. Everyone agreed to accept his advice. The Elder, a man of 100 years, reviewed the information and quickly came to a decision. He dictated that the wrongs committed were equal, each family had lost a son and each family had killed a young man. Therefore there was no settlement, both families had been victims and also criminals and their situation was equal. He decreed that both murderers be released from jail; the Israel police respected this decision and freed them.

In the Sulha ceremony, the fathers of the accused murderers and of the victims tied knots in the kaffia as did the high ranking Bedouin and Druze sheiks; everyone pledging to keep peace between the families. Neither family was forced to move their tents far away from the community.

## **Themes I observed**

### **Shared Vision and Interdependence**

The explicit and ever present shared vision of the Bedouin's family and community centric view is **that life is to be lived to provide a better world for the children of the community**. The whole extended community assumes responsibility for the children. The individual is regarded by him/her self as a subset of family, extended family, tribe and community. Bedouins use the term "face of the community" to describe how they present themselves to the outside world.

### **Deep Listening and Dialogue**

Active deep listening is the way Bedouins and Druze interact in conversation. Important conversations are conducted in the ways defined as dialogue and strategic dialogue; thoughts are directed to the center of the group, everyone listens deeply and reflectively and there are long considered silences. Decisions and actions items are deferred until there has been thoughtful reflection and every voice has been heard.

My guide Morris was chided by an the very respected elder Druze sheik when Morris asked him his opinion about some of the political decisions about the Golan Heights. Sheik Salah said, Do not raise a question which you already have an answer for".

This comment resonates with the inquiry /advocacy work in which people are coached not to pose an inquiry as advocacy.

### **Respect for Elders' Wisdom**

The older men and women are regarded and treated with reverence and respect; their life long learning, wisdom and counsel are sought and honored.

Many of the homes have three generations living together. In one there was a particularly obvious contrast, , an older Druze sheik, wearing traditional robes and seated amongst a collection of antique brass coffee pots engaged in deep conversation with us on the top floor of the house, while a floor below his young granddaughter played a Barbie doll computer game and printed out color copies of her progress for us to see. Her CD player was playing Enya collections.

### **Intuition**

Bedouins are proud of their reputation for great powers of intuition. They use all their senses in interpreting the visible and invisible sensations around them using keen intentional listening and acute visual and kinesthetic perceptions. These finely tuned awareness capabilities support a highly developed, trusted intuition. Bedouins are

frequently used as scouts within the Israeli army for their tracking skills, but also for their intuitive sense of what the enemy will do in certain situations.

In conversation with a Bedouins, the flow takes on a different rhythm. I had the feeling that my mind was being read, as unspoken thoughts were responded to, including thoughts that would *not* have been verbalized. Beja chided me, “**stop thinking, you just missed seeing the beauty of the raven taking off in flight, stop thinking and be more aware.**”

### **Learning – stories, histories**

Bedouins and Druze have an oral history tradition that embraces a very deep understanding of an event; the psychological background, environment, mental models, actions, and results are all used to recount a story. I would describe these stories as “learning histories” End Note 1. Reflection, objective analysis, and learnings for the future are disseminated in the form of often repeated and referenced stories. For one unfamiliar with the stories, it appears as a multi-dimensional map of cryptic references all interwoven to form a complex pattern of allusions.

In the Bedouin village Malame, where I stayed, the “learning historian and story teller” was Souma, the brother of the more action oriented, village chief Dyan, Dyan called Souma to our table where he spent an entire day, intently listening to my questions, and answering them with many detailed stories about life in Malame, explaining how the community made decisions and how they resolved conflicts.

### **Use of rituals and symbols**

Bedouin life is enveloped in a rich tapestry of symbols and rituals. In the smallest community whether in tents or in villages, the daily pattern of life is invisibly guided by these audio, visual and tactile rituals and symbols. The day begins early with the Mullah’s call to prayer, live, or more frequently from worn tape cassettes played over poor quality public address systems. The visual rituals in decorations, living arrangements, clothing, even tattoos, allow space for individual expression and modernizations.

One evening Morris left to go home to be with his family. Dyan decided to take Alan the photographer and me to visit Dyan’s sister and her family. They lived remotely in an isolated house on a cliff high above the Jordan valley. We stopped en route to look out over a magical vista of tiny patch work villages and farms. Dyan of course knew each village and most of the individual farms. He explained that the nationality of the farmers was obvious by the patterns of the rows of crops.

In Dyan’s sister’s home there was a satellite connected television set showing an absurd farcical wrestling match beamed live from Texas in the US. There were costumed

wrestlers and barely clothes women running around the ring. The living room had the traditional seating pattern, men in chairs along one wall, women and children under large blankets at a right angle; everyone drank orange soda and snacked on pita bread.

## **What can we learn from the Bedouins and Druze?**

### **Shared Vision and Value**

Our identification with our organizations and with our teams could mirror the community dominant lifestyle. One often hears, "I spend more time with my team than with my family." Unfortunately the transitional, transactional and opportunistic nature of many of these alliances adds elements of fragility and mistrust to the relationships. Leaders have evolved visions or igniting questions that inspire and motivate employees to work as a community, and of course there are the on line shared communities of practice.

Virtual teams which are increasingly the way organizations work in the global environment present a special challenge. A shared vision is easy to maintain behind the cover of teleconferences and webinars with conflict submerged and the attendant creative thinking effectively dampened.

Serious attention to shared visions and values, not just as a yearly obligatory exercise is learning we can model from the Bedouins. CEOs like Tony Hsieh of Zappos have made their shared values a truly integral part of the organizational fabric.

### **Deep Listening and Dialogue**

The Bedouin and Druze listen deeply to each other and they use the principles of dialogue in their meetings. They meet in the ways similar to those of many native peoples – sitting in a circle, speaking to the center and listening reflectively when someone is speaking.

There is universal acknowledgement that we in organizations must improve the quality of our communications and conversations.

Major corporations, like Ford, have experimented with dialogue, removing conference tables, holding meetings with people sitting in a circle, working at deep listening and questioning without pre-conceived opinions, and have set aside dialogue rooms dedicated to conversations using the skills of dialogue that we have (re) learned from native peoples.

There are educational efforts to improve listening skills, to suspend mental models, to balance inquiry and advocacy, and to better utilize the collective pool of wisdom in the room. Where there has been serious commitment and modeling by senior management there has been improvement, and evidence that we can learn to be in conversation with one another as people have been for centuries. We can continue to learn and profit from the experience of native peoples.

### **Respect for Elders' Wisdom**

The eldest man in a Bedouin community speaks first opening group meetings. When traditional methods of reconciliation fail, as in the double murder case, the community turns to the eldest man for advice. Elders are given the highest level of respect and honor and their wisdom is solicited.

Recently I met a man who had been a high level executive in one of France's largest enterprises his international brokering deals in the world wide press. When I asked him what he was doing now, he replied "now I am retired and I am a zero".

I have watched with pain as junior consultants refused to attend training sessions lead by senior directors, believing that the directors' experience and wisdom just didn't match up to the newest *technique d' jour*.

Artificial intelligence and Knowledge management have not delivered the promised results, and secrets of leadership, oil discovery, truffle hunting and dowsing remain in the domain of those *un – de* -programmable experts.

Although naïve to envision a cultural shift where retired executives are regarded as the wise men of our organizational cultures; we must create the opportunities to receive their counsel and listen to their stories and unwritten histories. Some organizations have created roles for senior advisors and are treating their positions and contributions with deserved respect. Other retired executives serve on boards of directors, where, increasingly, they engage in tactical as well as strategic decision making taking advantage of their experience and wisdom.

### **Use of rituals and symbols**

The British sociologist Anthony Giddens (End note 3) writes:  
*Without ordered ritual and collective involvement, individuals are left without structured ways of coping with tensions and anxieties. Communal rites provide a focus for group solidarity at major transitions.*

We in organizations have made attempts; some belittled and ridiculed, with ordered ritual and collective involvement and symbolism in recognition of Giddens' and others'

counsel. What greater tensions and anxieties develop than those we impose with Change Movements? A recent merger of organizations resulted in the removal of one of the company's logos, a unicorn. For already alienated employees, the eradication of the unicorn symbolized the death of their company and culture. One executive remarked sadly, "now our unicorn is in heaven with Sir Henry", (the company's deceased founder). Symbolism when engaging, as with purposefully designed logos, can indeed provide a deeply evocative collective response reflective of an organization's shared vision. Carelessly derived slogans with accompanying tee shirts, hats and coffee mugs trivialize what can be a meaningful symbol in our corporate and increasingly less personally connected organizations.

For the Bedouins and the Druze, the ritualism of the Sulha is an in ensuring respect of a settlement. The public verbal commitment of the wise men as they physically tie knots in the white kaffia is acknowledgement of their agreement and williness to enforce their family, tribe and community compliance. The knotted kaffia is a vibrant symbol of the commitments made to ensure peace.

Meetings in a Bedouin community are always held in the chief's tent or house. Men sit on the ground or in chairs arranged in a circle, everyone always sitting in the same position. There is a traditional meal first, followed by the meeting. The oldest man present opens the meeting. This in itself a centuries old ritual, grounding the proceedings as Biddens write, with "ordered ritual and collective involvement." The collective decision making proceeds traditionally, in dialogue form. As recounted earlier, questions, like whom to support in a national election (everyone in the village votes for the same candidate) can be part of the agenda, as well as village affairs, such as what land can be used for building new homes.

## **Interviews**

What we in organizations call assessment of an organization is in many ways an incomplete version of the interviews that Bedouin and Druze wise men carry out when they are determining the true events of a conflict. The committee (Jaha) interviews a very large number of people, the victim, the victim's family, the accused, the accused's family, and all witnesses. There is a ritual to the interviews; first a dinner then the questions. The interviewers are those chosen for their wisdom and patience and are not necessarily the leaders of the tribes. Each member of the Jaha interviews the same people. Thus each person will have been interviewed several times. The Jaha meets regularly to compare notes; so if anyone has changed his version of the events, they are aware of this. Also each person will be interviewed by only one person of his own tribe/faith, as the Jahas are composed of people of different tribes/faiths, but all having respect from the communities.

When we do organizational assessments, usually each person is interviewed only once. We know that different interviewers elicit different responses from the same people; yet rarely do we allocate enough resources and time to evolve this more complete picture.

## **Change Management**

The symbolism and commitment involved in a traditional carefully scripted reconciliation; offers opportunities to learn from for differing observations and opinions. Everyone leaves the Sulha ritual feeling that their view has been considered and listened to with great attention by people whom they respect, their reputation and that of their family, tribe, and village has been honored. And, they have made the collective commitment to respect the agreement.

Change management, whether organizational, (mergers and acquisitions) process, or technology all offer the opportunity for the expression of honoring, valuing and respecting the past state in congruence with the movement to future state. We need to honor the real and symbolic unicorns of our organizations before we can move forward with a committed workforce.

## **Commitment to implementation**

After the needs analysis and program design, implementation of change is a fundamental problem with change management programs in organizations. One client organization is now, ten years after the consultants left, becoming serious about the implementation of a project that consumed millions of euros in consultants' fees and uncounted hours of the organization's time over the two year planning period.

Enterprise integration, process re-definition, empowerment, the list of unimplemented projects and shelved, ignored, costly consultants' reports is legendary. After listening to the story of the Sulha, one consultant suggested only half in jest that perhaps if we asked all the high level managers to tie a knot in the company's corporate flag maybe we would insure commitment to project implementation.

Honoring present state and using the everyday aspects of Bedouin and Druze existence: dialogue, respect for elders' wisdom, deep listening, leaders modeling commitment, the rituals involved in of decision making and reconciliation all could aid in ensuring successful implementation of change programs.

When I explained the problems organizations have with implementing programs one of the village wise men, said, "*I don't understand, once the wise men have agreed, then everyone should do what they tell them to*".

## Values

Many of the Bedouin and Druze governing principles are reflective of what we describe as *feminine values*. Management gurus write of the needs for collaboration, interdependence, deep listening skills, intuition, and systemic approaches to decision-making in the services oriented economies.

When queried about how feminine values could influence the solutions to the problems with the Paris banlieues and alienated youth; sociologist and author, Mike Burke responded, “male oriented values approaches of legislation will not solve the problems, but a feminine values oriented approach of reconciliation, recognition and interdependence would”. (End note 4).

## Concerns

- Our mental models are keeping us from learning from the traditions of the Arab culture. Current images of terrorists, mass murderers, suicide bombers, rampaging alienated, youths burning cars are in the forefront of our Arab images today. Why do we in the West by pass the opportunities to learn from the wise men and women of the Middle East? Yet, we travel to the Far East to learn from the wise men there.
- Elder statesmen of the Bedouin and Druze communities are dying, and with them the stories and wisdom of their generation and of those before. Two of the sheiks, one Bedouin and one Druze have died since I had conversations with them. Theirs is a culture of oral tradition and history; with a frightening paucity of documentation their sons generally do not have the patience and reflective natures of their fathers. Their grandsons appear to have little interest in their culture and traditional ways. There is the very real danger that we will lose centuries worth of learning and wisdom; wisdom and learning that we can apply to our work within organizations.
- It is my concern that the rush to Western culture among the native peoples of the Middle East is accelerating the loss of tradition within the communities. I fear that the Bedouins and to a less extent, the Druze, do not at all realize the value of their traditions and the necessity to preserve them.
- One cannot ignore the political realities of life in the north of Israel. Bedouins who once freely herded their goats in the area find their traditional routes cut by barbed wire; farmers whose olive trees are now beyond reach – over a political border that has no reality in their lives. Bombs from Hezbollah rain down on small villages and farms. Army service, albeit voluntary, alters the mental landscape of the Bedouin and Druze.



- We need to be cognizant of the learning possibilities from all the native peoples in the world. We have lost much wisdom. Our movements of sustainability need to include preservation of practices and wisdom of native peoples as well as of our physical resources.

### **Summary**

*After many days of hearing stories and conversations, I asked Baja if he could speak with my clients, what would he say to them? Without hesitation he said:*

- 1. Don't be afraid to fall**
- 2. Stop thinking, experience**
- 3. Spend time with children**
- 4. Worry about your own visions instead of worrying about others**

### **Endnotes:**

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4. Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Modern Age* (Sanford, CA Stanford University Press, 1991) P.204.
5. Burke, Mike, European Professional Women's Network - Paris presentation January 26, 2006 author of: *The Silent Revolution, The Emergence of Feminine Values in the Work Place*, Burke, Mike and Sarda, Pierre, 2005 ISBN -927015-33-1, also author of "Les Valeurs Fémines, Le Pouvoir Demain."

Note: The names of people and places have been changed to honor their privacy

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