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ABSTRACT

THE THIRD SPACE: THE MEETING OF JEW AND CHRISTIAN  
IN THE ACT OF REMEMBERING, RESTORING,  
AND RECONCILING – A CASE STUDY OF  
THE MATZEVAH FOUNDATION

By

Steven D. Reece

Chair: Erich W. Baumgartner

## ABSTRACT OF GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH

Dissertation

Andrews University

School of Education

Title: THE THIRD SPACE: THE MEETING OF JEW AND CHRISTIAN IN THE ACT OF REMEMBERING, RESTORING, AND RECONCILING – A CASE STUDY OF THE MATZEVAH FOUNDATION

Name of researcher: Steven D. Reece

Name and degree of faculty chair: Erich W. Baumgartner, PhD

Date completed: October 14, 2019

### Problem

Due to long-standing religious, racial, and cultural tensions, a complex and challenging relationship exists between Jews and Christians. The resulting breach isolates and separates these two faith groups from each other. Consequently, they struggle to interact and engage in meaningful dialogue, which could repair the breach and lead to forgiveness and reconciliation. Dialogue bridges the gap between Jew and Christian allowing them to meet in the third space—the liminal space of the Jewish cemetery in Poland. Jews and Christians may deal with the evil of the past through what researchers term as “loving acts.”

## Method

This study was conducted as a qualitative case study of the work of The Matzevah Foundation (TMF) in its efforts to bring Jew and Christian together in the space of the Polish-Jewish cemetery to work cooperatively to care for and restore cemeteries. The study employed a purposeful sampling method that selected specific people, who have had contact with TMF and its work. Sources of data for the study were derived from individual and corporate interviews, observations, documents, artifacts, and personal reflective journals. Through inquiry of the interaction of Jews and Christians in the liminal space of the Polish-Jewish cemetery, the study sought to understand how acts of loving-kindness influence attitudes and create mutual bridges of understanding as the underpinning for dialogue. The investigation asked two primary questions. First, how have Jews and Christians responded to the work of TMF? Second, in what ways did Jews and Christians learn how to dialogue within their interaction in the work of TMF?

## Results

It was discovered that Jews and Christians reacted to the work of TMF in five ways: developing relationships, engaging in loving acts, remembering, restoring, and reconciling. These reactions produced the footing for dialogue. The data revealed a framework for dialogue that emerged from Jewish and Christian interaction, which consisted of seven components: addressing proselytism, developing common ground, gaining understanding, building a sense of community, speaking about matters of faith, confronting the present past, and overcoming differences among them.

## Conclusions

The study discovered a potential model for Jewish and Christian dialogue and contributed a greater understanding of the experience of dialogue. Instead of meeting and talking, the distinctive difference of dialogue as encountered in this study is the creation of a nexus within the liminality of a cemetery in which Jews and Christians may mutually interact and cooperate in the restoration of Jewish cemeteries in Poland.

Andrews University

School of Education

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THE MATZEVAH FOUNDATION

A Dissertation

Presented in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

by

Steven D. Reece

October 14, 2019

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Date approved



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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CJCUC	The Center for Jewish–Christian Understanding and Cooperation
ELT	Experiential Learning Theory
FBO	Faith Based Organization
FODŻ	Fundacja Ochrony Dziedzictwa Żydowskiego (Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage in Poland)
GPS	Global Positioning System
GLOBE	Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior Effectiveness Study
IRS	Internal Revenue Service
RCC	Rabbinical Commission for Matters of Cemeteries
TMF	The Matzevah Foundation
UNESCO	The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
U.S.	United States
WWII	Second World War or World War II



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Writing a dissertation is akin to learning how to ride a bicycle. It requires a willingness to try, stumble, and learn, as well as resilience, determination, and perseverance. The dissertation has been an arduous journey filled with valleys and peaks, despair and joy, frustration and happiness. I have faced difficulties and obstacles. At times, I wanted to give up and quit, but I persevered and found a way to overcome the barriers and setbacks that I encountered. As I finish my dissertation, I would like to thank the people who have helped me along the way.

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<sup>1</sup> I will follow the Jewish practice suggested by Manosevitz (2010) of not pronouncing the “name of the Divine,” and I will, therefore “use the spelling G-d” or L-rd (p. 55) unless quoted from a source, which uses “God” or “Lord.”

raised our family, learned to lead, and follow G-d's call on our life. To this end, we crossed an ocean and lived among Poles, learning to speak their language, and we developed a deep and abiding love for Polish Christians and Polish Jews. Thank you for encouraging me to explore G-d's calling and to begin caring for and restoring Jewish cemeteries in Poland. I am grateful for your enthusiastic support as I have established and led The Matzevah Foundation (TMF) for these many years. I am indebted to you for the freedom, encouragement, and backing you have given me over these past seven years as I have pursued the Ph.D. Thank you for your willingness to listen, clarify, and help me navigate the twists and turns of the writing of my dissertation.

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## EPIGRAPH

“To do evil is like sport to a fool,”

Proverbs 10:23a (New King James Version).

“They came too late since it was too late to save anyone.

The whole world was lost and destroyed.

The whole world that was worthy of being called a world was gone.”

Miriam Akavia following her liberation from Bergen-Belsen

(cited in, Dreifuss, Tel Aviv University, & Yad Vashem, 2016a).

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### **An Unexpected Journey**

The rain fell lightly, pelting my coat and the undergrowth around me. The damp, cold air penetrated my skin, making my hands ache in the moist, crisp autumn air.

September in Poland can seem like early winter: dark clouds, cool temperatures, and persistent rain. In front of me, Szymon was already soaking wet from wandering amid the thick brush. He maneuvered with his handheld GPS ducking in and out of the scrubland, searching for something concealed. We were in a large field adjacent to a river. On any other day, the site would be idyllic; however, today, it was grim and uninviting. We were looking for the grave of a Jewish mother and her two children.

More than 70 years ago, the trio was on the run after escaping a Nazi roundup of the Jewish residents of their small shtetl, a village today called Chroberz. As the group sought refuge in the fields outside their hamlet, they found no place to hide and no way of escape. Instead, they met their death. According to eyewitness testimony, a group of Nazi soldiers shot them from a nearby bridge about a quarter of a mile away. What went through the minds of these German soldiers as they fired upon the group of defenseless Jews, killing the mother and her two children? What did the people think, who buried them near the spot, where we were standing, as seen in Photograph 1?





*Photograph 1. A Matzevah as a Memory Marker*

In September 2017, Szymon back fills a hole with earth for a wooden matzevah placed to mark the grave of a Jewish mother and her two children. The family of Jews were murdered and buried in a field near Chroberz, Poland in 1942. © Copyright 2017-2019 by Steven D. Reece.

Szymon and I were in this field, not far from the bridge, trying to locate and mark their grave, and thereby speak to the injustice of their murder and bring justice to their memory. Hundreds and even thousands of mass graves containing thousands upon thousands of Jewish murder victims dot the landscape of Poland. Many of these burial sites, along with their victims, are forgotten. On this day, we were searching for just seven of these forgotten mass graves, which collectively entombed more than 2,500 disregarded Jewish victims of the Shoah. With some difficulty, we found this forgotten burial site with its Jewish victims in Chroberz. We dug a small hole near the grave and erected a wooden *matzevah* (Hebrew for a grave marker) to mark the location of this Jewish mother and her children's unmarked grave.

Why were Szymon and I in this field in Poland, on a chilly, wet September day? What were we doing? Why were we marking a forgotten mass grave? I am a Baptist minister, and Szymon is a Jew. How did we get here?

### Questions

Many years ago, I lived in Poland among Poles, where I served as a Baptist minister, cooperating with the Baptist Union of Poland. I learned Polish, and I became a student of Polish culture and history. I became particularly interested in the tragic tale of Poland during and after World War II (WWII). I read much about the plight of Poles and their Jewish neighbors. Why should an American Baptist minister be concerned with the aftermath of the Shoah? After all, my family and I had nothing to do with it.

For many people today, Auschwitz is a forgotten place, a decaying memory. Nonetheless, it stands and lives on today as a museum, sustaining an enduring remembrance of the Shoah. Auschwitz cries out, demanding justice for innocent victims murdered in its gas chambers. It was just one of the six Nazi Germany death camps built and operated in occupied Poland as a means to annihilate the Jews of Europe on an industrial scale. More so, it symbolizes the events of the Shoah and the murder of millions of Jews, who were forced to work and relegated to die in labor or concentration camps, caged and starved in Ghettos, rounded up and deported to death camps, and marched or carted off from villages, towns, and cities to be executed in mass shootings across Eastern European fields, ravines, and forests.

Ultimately, the enduring legacy of Auschwitz is one of asking ourselves tough questions. I have visited Auschwitz and Auschwitz-Birkenau on numerous occasions.

Every time I visit, I go to the gas chambers, crematoria, and ash pits. I stand in silence, surveying what remains, and ask myself, “Why?”

Forty years ago, Racelle Weiman (2008) had a similar question and sought reasons as to why the Shoah happened from Yehuda Bauer, who she states was at the time, “the preeminent Holocaust scholar” (p. 88). In response to her inquiry, Weiman relates that Bauer said that historians could answer the historical questions concerning the events of the Shoah, such as, how it began, who was involved, and where it occurred. However, she discovered that, according to Bauer, historians could not answer the questions concerning “why men do evil” and “where was God,” because they “are not historical questions—for that, you will have to go elsewhere” (p. 88).

I do not have an answer for the evil perpetrated by the Nazis during WWII and the Shoah. Nor do I have a reason for the slaughter of millions of Jews across Europe, and particularly in Poland. All I know is that I feel compelled to speak to the injustice of the Shoah and confront its evil. The question for me became: How?

#### A Choice

One day in 2004, I faced a choice. I met Anna, who worked as a waitress in a restaurant just outside of Warsaw in suburban Otwock. A group of Baptist volunteers from the US and I were staying in the hotel where Anna worked. She was interested in us and engaged me in conversation daily. Anna was curious about what I was doing with the group in her city. At every meal, she asked me a great many questions about what we are doing and was very pleased with our work and the good that we were doing for her city. Then one day and quite unexpectedly, she suggested that I take this group to visit the Jewish cemetery in Otwock. Her suggestion was uncharacteristic of general Polish

interest. Discussing such Jewish matters are commonly restricted and considered taboo in most cultural circumstances in Poland.

By suggesting that I visit a Jewish cemetery, Anna was taking an enormous risk and was crossing into a conflicted territory. She invited me to enter into that contested cultural space, which exists sandwiched between Jews and Poles. I had to choose my words carefully. I did not ask her if she was a Jew or Jewish, as this would be a *faux pas*—a cultural blunder. Instead, I asked her very politely: “*Czy ma pani pochodzenie Żydowskie* (Madam, are you of Jewish descent)?” She replied, “Yes.” And then quietly added, “There are many of us in hiding here.”

At that moment, I realized that what she was saying to me was uniquely valuable. A Polish woman of Jewish origins proposed that I visit a Jewish cemetery. I had no idea what her proposal meant. I sensed that I needed to visit this cemetery, but I did not know why. What would I see? Why did she think that I needed to see the cemetery? Why did it matter? What does it mean? In what ways were Jewish cemeteries different? What was their importance to a Jew, or someone like Anna, who had Polish-Jewish heritage? Why should a Jewish cemetery matter to me as a Christian, and as a Baptist minister? I felt compelled to explore these uncertain questions and to visit this Jewish cemetery.

Following my conversation with Anna, I began researching Jewish cemeteries in Poland. Jewish cemeteries were the physical remnant of the Jewish presence in Poland. The genocide of the Third Reich was both physical and cultural. The Nazis decimated roughly ninety percent of the pre-war Jewish population of Poland, but they also burned numerous synagogues and desecrated Jewish cemeteries by removing the stone *matzevot* (Hebrew plural form for headstones) and using them as building materials.

The communist government of Poland built factories, schools, hospitals, and roads on top of Jewish cemeteries. *Matzevot* became building materials once more in homes, buildings, and parks. Some Jewish communities in the larger cities attempted to renew their lives and communities after the war. In 1946, Poles infamously murdered more than forty Jews in a pogrom in Kielce. Many surviving Jews began to emigrate, while others were determined to stay. Whatever hope there was for the restoration of Jewish life, culture, and religious life after the war ended in 1968, when the communist government forced Jews to emigrate to Israel and elsewhere. A minuscule Jewish community remained, but for the most part, it did not express itself publicly for many years. As a net result, the majority of Jewish cemeteries fell into decay, were overgrown, and forgotten.

#### A Radical Idea

In my research, I stumbled upon a webpage for the International Jewish Cemetery Restoration Project (IJCRP) in 2004. Unfortunately, the original website no longer exists, and what remains may be found here: <http://www.iajgsjewishcemeteryproject.org/poland/poland-jewish-cemeteries-restoration-project.html>. In 2004, the IJCRP listed seven reasons for restoring Jewish cemeteries in Poland:

1. To recover and restore what is left of our heritage in Poland;
2. To remember the hundreds of thousands of murdered Jews, buried in mass graves in most of the cemeteries and nearby forests;
3. Honoring the dead and care of cemeteries is the highest level of Mitzvot that a Jew can perform . . . because the dead cannot give thanks (“Mitzvot”—Hebrew plural for good deeds; “Mitzvah”—Hebrew singular for good deed);

4. We have little time left before the destruction of these sites is complete;
5. For valuable genealogical and historical information;
6. For Jewish and non-Jewish tour groups, traveling through Poland, especially Jewish youth, eager to learn about their heritage and the Holocaust;
7. For reconciliation between Poles and Jews.

As I read these statements, I began to understand the reasons to restore Jewish cemeteries from a global, Jewish perspective. Regrettably, this last statement about reconciliation went missing from the rationale statements over the past decade, as the project changed and became absorbed by other institutions. Notwithstanding at the time, the idea of reconciling Poles and Jews but even more broadly reconciling Christians and Jews, struck me sharply and markedly stood out from the others.

From my perspective as a Baptist minister, I resonated with the word, reconciliation, and its pure concepts of bringing together, restoring relations, or reconnecting shattered lives. What did reconciliation mean in terms of Poles and Jews, or Jews and Christians? Was such reconciliation possible? What would it take to reconcile Jews and Christians, but more practically Poles and Jews, who share such a common, tragic, and painful history? What could I do?

My search for understanding regarding these questions led me to another question: What should be my response to the Shoah? What could one person do? Sometime later that summer, I followed up on Anna's proposition—an invitation actually, and I took a group of Baptist volunteers to visit this Jewish cemetery in the forest on the outskirts of Otwock. So there in this quite, lonely, and desolate place, I began to consider a thought that for me was new, even radical. I asked myself these

questions: What if I started caring for and restoring *this* overgrown, neglected, and deserted Jewish cemetery? By so doing, would it be possible, maybe to bring even a tiny bit of healing to the wounds inflicted upon Poland?

I began to explore the possibility of what it would take for me to restore just this *one* Jewish cemetery in Otwock, Poland. Why? I saw it as a means to open a dialogue with the Jewish community toward reconciliation. At the time, I had no real idea of what that might mean or entail; I merely wanted to engage Baptist volunteers in caring for a Jewish cemetery in Poland. What would that look like—Baptist, Christian volunteers caring for and restoring this small Jewish cemetery hidden away in the forest just outside of Otwock?

### The First Steps of Reconciliation

I began investigating the matter, and I learned that I needed to gain permission and guidance to work in a Polish-Jewish cemetery from the Chief Rabbi of Poland. In March 2005, I met with Szymon for the first time; he represented the Chief Rabbi of Poland, and the *Komisja Rabiniczna do Spraw Cmentarzy* (the Rabbinical Commission for Matters of Cemeteries—RCC). I asked Szymon if it would be possible to bring Baptist volunteers to care for and begin to restore the Jewish cemetery in Otwock. He asked me, “Why would you want to do that?” I replied in Polish, “*Pojednanie* (Reconciliation).” Szymon said, “Okay.” My response was not a significant explanation—just one word: *pojednanie* (reconciliation), but it was enough. I had no idea what to do or what it would take to restore a Jewish cemetery in Poland, but I was willing to learn. With that one word, I began my quest for reconciliation.

Beginning in the summer of 2005 through the summer of 2008, I led American Christians, mostly Baptist, volunteers to partner with Polish Jews, Baptists, and the local Poles to care for and restore Jewish cemeteries in Otwock, Warsaw, Sochaczew, and Pruszków. In these locations, we cleaned and cleared Jewish cemeteries of undergrowth, collected and removed debris, built simple fencing, and restored a section of a wall. Volunteer teams would spend five days living, eating, and working with each other over a week. They also participated in cultural activities and toured historic locations such as the Warsaw Ghetto, Auschwitz, and Treblinka.

From the beginning, training volunteers was critically important, especially as it concerned what type of work could be performed in a Jewish cemetery, along with the Jewish spiritual and cultural traditions involved. I worked closely with Szymon, RCC, and the Warsaw Jewish community to train volunteers. Szymon became the main face of the Jewish community for volunteers because he led seminars introducing volunteers to the Jewish cemetery, Jewish cultural burial rites, traditions, and practices. Szymon speaks English but asked me to translate his workshops from Polish to English. In this way, I learned to understand the *Halakhah* or Jewish Law associated with burial and interment of bodies. A core of volunteers emerged, who would return annually to work in Jewish cemetery restoration. These volunteers became the nucleus of what I was doing and became the focus of my attention as I developed them as leaders.

### Dialogue and a New Horizon

In 2008 after twelve years of living in Poland, my family and I left our work in Poland and returned to the U.S. to care for our adolescent children and my wife's aging parents. Before I left Poland, I met with Szymon to share with him our decision. By this



time, Szymon and I had become friends, which in Polish culture is no easy process. When I shared my news with him, he was disappointed, of course, but he said something to me that was critically important for me to hear. He said,

In this day and age, I do not see why you could not continue your work in caring for and restoring Jewish cemeteries in Poland. Do not forget. You have entered one of the most difficult dialogues in the world.

His words stunned me and caught me off guard. At that moment, I realized that something had changed in my relationship with Szymon and the Jewish community of Poland with whom I had been interacting over the past four years. He was telling me that I had a seat at the table of dialogue. What did that mean? What would I do now going forward as I returned home to the States? I did not know.

Upon my return home, I sought a ministerial role within Baptist churches. I had several possibilities to consider, but the matter of Jewish cemeteries in Poland was ever-present. Along a parallel pathway, a group of volunteers, who had developed out of one particular Baptist church continued working in Jewish cemeteries without me in the summers of 2009 and 2010. One of these volunteers approached me in the fall of 2009 and told me that I should consider returning. After prayer and consultation with numerous people, I decided to determine what it would take for me, along with this solid nucleus of volunteers to establish a domestic, non-profit organization to continue the work that I began. Within two years of my conversation with Szymon, this committed group and I formed The Matzevah Foundation, Inc. (TMF) in December 2010.

I am the founder and president of TMF, which is led by a board of directors comprised of this core group of Christians, who grew out of working in Jewish cemeteries since 2005. TMF is a tax-exempt, non-profit corporation incorporated in the State of Georgia and recognized by the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) as a public

charity. In leading TMF, I have been diligently developing and deepening my understanding of cross-cultural diversity issues concerning the Jewish worldview and matters related to Jewish and Christian interaction, so that I might become a more competent, cross-cultural leader.

Through my work, I have been “invited to the table” in the dialogue of injustice with the Jewish community. At this table, I am not seeking to facilitate an interfaith dialogue with the Jewish community; although quite invaluable, such an explicit, focused ministry remains beyond the scope of my work. Instead, I am attempting to broaden and deepen the dialogue that I already have with the Jewish community so that TMF may effectively realize its two-fold mission: to educate the public about the Shoah and to care for and restore Jewish cemeteries in Poland. Through remembering and caring for desolate and forgotten Jewish cemeteries in Poland, I lead TMF and others to honor the memory and celebrate the lives of ordinary, everyday Polish Jews who lost their lives in the Shoah. Through dialogue, I desire to work toward forgiveness and reconciliation, possibly restoring the broken relationship that exists between Jew and Christian.

### **Background of the Problem**

For millennia to maintain their distinct cultural and religious identity, Jews lived apart from non-Jews. By not assimilating into the host culture wherever they settled, Jews were frequently viewed suspiciously by those among whom they dwelled. For example, Tacitus, a Roman historian, saw Jewish traditions and customs as shaping “them as strangers and even evil strangers” (Dreifuss, Tel Aviv University, & Yad Vashem, 2016b). Primarily in Europe, Jews became “*the others* and hated and feared as such” (Dreifuss et al., 2016b). Christianity embraced this hatred of the Jews, and in the 4th

century, integrated it as a component of “the theological worldview of Christianity” (Dreifuss et al., 2016b).

### Dyadic Hatred

According to Anton Houtepen (2004), a Christian, ecumenical theologian, this type of hatred is not merely racial anti-Semitism, but it is “a definite and conscious *banning or curse* of the Jews, based on theological presuppositions” (p. 208). Houtepen concludes that “the Nazi-regime was clearly motivated by its racist ideology, but at the same time condoned by historical Christian and Muslim anti-Judaism” (p. 208). The Jewish philosopher and rabbi, Emil Fackenheim (2002) says that he has “no choice but to see” the destruction of the Jews of Europe as being “racism-in-general;” even so, he distinguishes the events of the Shoah “as a unique and ultimate assault on *Jewish faith*,—nay, *on the God of Israel*” (para. 22).

Understanding the nature of this dyadic hatred is critical. When racial hatred and theological condemnation are linked, it enables and justifies the removal from the social order, the other—the stranger, the alien, or the one among us, who does not fit the norm or the accepted status quo of the community.

### Polish-Jewish Relations

The interaction of Christian Poles and their Jewish neighbors historically may be characterized as that of being mutually exclusive and at times, tense filled with conflict. Indeed, racial anti-Semitism and anti-Judaist thinking were (and are) historical factors in Polish and Jewish relations. Nonetheless, for the better part of a thousand years, Poles and Jews lived somewhat peaceably and amicably together, much like siblings under the same roof, albeit who had different parents. Of all the countries in which Jews resided in

Europe, they found sanctuary and thrived in Poland. For in Poland, Jews were free to be Jews, for the most part, becoming a “significant, highly visible and not entirely powerless minority” (Hoffman, 2000, p. 12). Before WWII, Poland had the largest Jewish population of any European country, totaling roughly 3.5 million Jews, which comprised about twelve percent of the total population of Poland. As stated by Stanisław Krajewski (2007), the influence of the Jewish minority in Poland “was felt everywhere, and that has shaped perceptions of reality, not only in an antisemitic vein” (p. 142).

Current relations among Poles and Jews in Poland and abroad are mixed and at times, stressed. Andrzej Folwarczny (2006) emphasizes that the prevailing viewpoint of Jewish communities outside of Poland is “that Poles looked upon the Holocaust with indifference” and at times, “even actively took part in the extermination of the Jews” (p. 147). While on the other hand, he notes that Poles tend to focus “mainly on Polish suffering and the heroism of Righteous Poles who saved Jews during World War II” (p. 147). Many political changes in Poland have led to an improvement in Polish-Jewish relations; nonetheless, he considers that “relations between ordinary people—Poles and Jews—confront us with deeply rooted stereotypes” (p. 148).

### The Strategic Choice of Poland

The common belief is that the Nazi regime, or the *Third Reich* (Empire), chose Poland for the setting of the Final Solution of the Jewish Question because of Polish anti-Semitism; however, this is not the case. The Nazis strategically adopted Poland as their surrogate for “their gigantic laboratory for mass murder,” solely for the reason that Poland was the home to the most significant European Jewish population (Zimmerman, 2003, p. 3). Although the Poles did not conceive the Shoah, Zimmerman specifies that

what the Nazis propagated in Poland “had tainted Polish soil forever” (p. 6). Dealing with the aftermath of the Shoah would require cleansing Poland and its people from this “terrible burden of history” by allowing the Polish people to see themselves and their country “in the light of truth” (Zimmerman, 2003, p. 6). According to Zimmerman (2003), the Shoah “is the tragedy of the Poles” (p. 7) because, just as their Jewish neighbors, Poles had no choice.

Throughout dark days of Germany’s occupation and the extermination of the Jews, Poles faced “an unprecedented moral trial” through which it would be difficult to say if anyone else “would have come through it better” (Zimmerman, 2003, p. 7). Moreover, Poles were eyewitnesses and saw firsthand the events of the Shoah and the predicament of their Jewish neighbors. Although, as a country, Poland did not collaborate with the Third Reich, some Poles, as did some Jews, betrayed their neighbors or fellow countrymen. Often, Poles were slightly more than bystanders, doing little or nothing to protect their Jewish neighbors from the Nazi brutality. Nevertheless, many times, Poles were noble and assisted their Jewish neighbors under the threat of execution. Poles are “the largest national group” of non-Jews to be designated as “Righteous Among the Nations” by Yad Vashem. More than 6,000 Polish citizens “risked death to save Jews during the war years” (Snyder, 2012, para. 21); “however, many Poles were complicit in the crimes against Jews” (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2018a, para. 3).

### The Destruction

During WWII, Poland lost more than eighteen percent of its total population, which included Poles, Jews, Byelorussians, Ukrainians, and Lithuanians. Collectively, Poland lost more than six million of its citizens: about three million Christian Poles, and

roughly three and a half million Polish Jews. While these losses appear numerically equivalent, they are not, especially in light of National Socialist policy and what transpired in Poland throughout the war. Both Poles and Jews were victims of the Third Reich, and consequently, both groups of people suffered, albeit *disproportionately*. The most extraordinary aspect though of the death of six million Polish citizens is this disproportional loss of life in relationship to Poles and Jews. Proportionally, ten percent of the ethnic Polish Christian population perished, while ninety percent of the Jewish community was eradicated due to the Nazi policy of genocide and its effective implementation of the Final Solution during its reign of terror and destruction in Poland.

In this continuum of suffering, victimization is not the primary issue, but governmental policies are. The policies of National Socialism in the Third Reich grew out of what is known as Social Darwinism. In 1850, the Englishman, Herbert Spencer, advanced the theory of “constant struggle between humans in which the strongest would win”—it was not the survival of the “fittest” as Darwin later postulated but the survival of the “strongest” (Bauer, 2001, p. 49). Nazi ideology desired to shape the entire world according to this racial theory. As such, “it did not limit itself to the Jews and to the aspiration of their disappearance and annihilation;” instead, Nazi Germany wanted to “create a New Order in Europe and beyond” (Dreifuss, Tel Aviv University, & Yad Vashem, 2016c). Moreover, Nazi Redemptive Anti-Semitism defined the Jews as an anti-race, a destructive element of humanity, and as such, they were a hazard to the existence of the new order of the world. Subsequently, this ideology could not be expressed or realized without “the well-rooted hostility toward the Jews of Europe” (Dreifuss, Tel Aviv University, & Yad Vashem, 2016d).

In the way that Nazi ideology viewed the world, Aryans “were considered the master race, consisting above all of the Germans and ethnic Germans in Eastern Europe, but also northwestern populations such as the Dutch and the Scandinavians” and people from such groups were viewed as “superior” (Dreifuss et al., 2016c). Consequently, such people “needed and deserved more”—than other people and needed “more rights, more food, more space: *lebensraum*, living space” (Dreifuss et al., 2016c). The Third Reich expressly pursued and executed genocidal policies targeting the Jews simply because they were Jews. Poles were victims, as well, because they were considered by Nazi policy as *Untermenschen*—people and nations, who were placed “at the bottom of the racial scale” (Dreifuss et al., 2016c). Jews and Poles were both victims of the ruthless Nazi occupation for different reasons, though they were “unequal victims,” to use a term phrased by the scholars Israel Gutman and Shmoleka Kofsky (cited in, Dreifuss et al., 2016c).

### Collective Memories

At present, the memory of the events of the Shoah is clouded at times and frequently disputed among Poles and Jews. Eva Hoffman (2000) considers that “the history of the Polish-Jewish relationship is one of the most complex examples of a contested past” (p. 9). Moreover, she views their history as “the embattled terrain of several collective memories, each with its claim to moral legitimacy, and each charged with fierce and sometimes vehement feelings” (p. 10). Louise Steinman (2013), the daughter of a Polish-Jewish mother and Ukrainian Jewish father, describes the contemporary relationship that Jews and Poles share. There is an emptiness in the space of her family’s history before the Shoah. She concludes that the relationship between

Jews and Poles is complicated and challenging even though they share a communal past. According to Steinman, “most [Jews] harbored more bitterness toward Poland than they did toward Germany,” even though they were once “part of Poland’s body and soul, but they’d been excised, cast out” (p. xi).

### The *Erschütterung* (Shock)

What transpired in Poland and across Europe during the Shoah is one of the most significant moral and ethical failures in history. It is essential to contemplate the historical context of the Shoah in order to understand the nature of such moral failure. The Shoah occurred in Europe, where, at the time, nearly 90% of all Europeans believed themselves to be Christians. Germany certainly reflected this disproportionate majority, where “95% of Germans were baptized, tax-paying members of an established Christian church” (Waller, 2007, p. 140).

Porton (2012) considers the viewpoints of three Jewish theologians, who “see a connection between Christianity and the Nazi ideology that created the Holocaust” (para. 5). Porton notes that Eliezer Berkovits, an Orthodox rabbi, states that Christianity enabled the Nazis to execute the Holocaust. Berkovits (1973) maintains,

Without the contempt and hatred for the Jews planted by Christianity in the hearts of the multitude of its followers, Nazism’s crime against the Jewish people could never have been conceived, much less executed (p. 40).

Additionally, Porton points to Richard L. Rubenstein, a Conservative rabbi, who maintains that Christians perpetrated a false image of a “mythological Jew” (para. 8). Rubenstein (1966) contends that this mythic or symbolic Jew, who like Judas, betrayed “Jesus with a token, a kiss,” and thereby delivered to the Nazi regime “an enormously



powerful religiomythic identification of the Jew with betrayal in the minds of German Christians” (p. 150).

Porton maintains that this Jewish iconography “provided the images and the models for the Nazis” to use in desensitizing the German population to Jews, who then became more and more to be viewed “as the devil’s surrogates, God-killers” producing “fertile ground for Nazi propaganda” (para. 8). Lastly, Porton asserts that Fackenheim “sees a close connection between Nazi anti-Semitism and the religious and social doctrines of Christianity” (para. 8).

Fackenheim (2002) recalls what he learned from his rabbi in his bar-mitzvah lessons: “Christianity and Islam are ‘daughter-religions’ of Judaism” (para. 4). If this is indeed the case, he paradoxically ponders, then why is it that the “‘daughters’ are so often indifferent to the ‘mother,’ even callous, even hate her” (para. 4). He reasons that something in the Christian theological framework and social consciousness needed to change following “the *Erschütterung*, ‘shock’ of Auschwitz” (para. 8). After the devastating events of the Shoah, Christians, by and large, in Germany and elsewhere in the world “attempted to pick up and continue as though no rupture had occurred and no transformation was required” (Karpen, 2002, p. 139).

Christian theologian Johann Baptist Metz was an early pioneer in addressing the break or divide between Jews and Christians arising from the Shoah. Fackenheim summarizes one of Metz’s central philosophical tenets concerning the Shoah: “to be involved with history is to refuse to evade history’s catastrophes” (Fackenheim, 2002, para. 39). Metz’s principle emphasizes that Christians do not live in a historical bubble, isolated and separated from the rest of humanity; therefore, they are not immune to

“history’s catastrophes.” As a result, Christians should reconsider their attitudes and beliefs toward Jews. To do so, Metz (1978) argues, “We Christians will never get back behind Auschwitz and, seen accurately, beyond Auschwitz only, no longer alone, but only with the victims” (para. 5).

Compassion means suffering together. Metz challenges Christians to seek to understand the fracture produced through the Shoah by being compassionate, i.e., to be “with the victims” in their suffering. Subsequently, Fackenheim (2002) concludes, “Metz urges Christians, at long last, *to listen* to Jews” (para. 41). Moreover, Karpen (2002) maintains that even though the Shoah creates “a break in history,” it must be acknowledged so that healing and reconciliation may emerge (p. 111).

#### The Need for Dialogue

Stanisław Krajewski (2005) declares, “In general, Christian-Jewish dialogue nowhere began before World War II” (p. 207). The profound terrors of the Shoah, and the “break in history” it produced, justifiably led *some* Jews and Christians to realize their need for dialogue. Concomitantly, Krajewski specifies that “the shock of the Shoah” coupled with “the establishment of the state of Israel led to a deeper dialogue in the West;” however, he maintains that “in Poland, the shock [of the Shoah] was almost non-existent, and certainly not expressed” (p. 207).

Krajewski reasons that this inimitable reality in post-war Poland is understandable, and is perhaps due to the acuteness of “general Polish suffering” (p. 207) and the proximity “of the death camps made reflection harder” (p. 208). Furthermore, he states that Christian-Jewish dialogue in Poland did not emerge until after the *Nostra Aetate* statement and the communist forced emigration of Jews in 1968 and 1969; only

then did the “Polish-Catholic intellectuals began the work of establishing the early stages of dialogue” (p. 209).

Apart from the dissimilar circumstances in Poland following the war, a group of Jews and Christians met formally at a conference in Seelisberg, Switzerland in 1947, so that they might mutually declare their collective anguish about the Shoah, their wish to confront anti-Semitism, and “their desire to foster stronger relationships between Jews and Christians” (International Council of Christians and Jews, 2009, p. 2). Their encounter produced the “Ten Points of Seelisberg,” calling for “Christian churches to reflect on and renew their understandings of Judaism and their relationship with Jews” (p. 2). Another outcome of this meeting was the establishment of the International Council of Christians and Jews (ICCJ), which continues “to pursue the dialogue [among Jews and Christians] in spite of difficulties” (p. 2). These advances following the Shoah were not ubiquitously adopted by Christian churches and theologians.

Although outdated, A. Roy Eckardt (1981) summarizes research regarding Jewish-Christian relations and dialogue following the war. At the time, he indicated that the “massive literature on the Shoah [was] written by Jews,” who focused their research “in smaller measure to the Christian-Jewish relation as such than do Christian writers” (p. 99). Christians, on the other hand, addressed principally Nazi ideology and “the question of Christendom’s responsibility for the anti-Semitism,” which ultimately produced the Shoah (p. 99). Even so, Eckardt queries how could it be that rather few Christians were willing “to acknowledge the evil character and implications of its ‘teaching of contempt’ (Jules Isaac) for the Jewish people” (p. 99)? More so with regards to such contemptuous

teaching, Krajewski (2005) maintains that “all Christians must come to terms with [it]” (p. 109).

After the *Erschütterung*, Fackenheim (2002) critically argues that Christian theologians in 1945 returned “seamlessly” to their theology “where they left it in 1933,” and wonders if they ever will address their anti-Semitic teaching, or, as he queries, “has ‘cultural amnesia’ set in” (para. 8)? Memory is subjective, and as such, it is selective, especially as it concerns remembering tragic historical events, such as the Shoah.

Concerning memory, Friedrich Nietzsche (1995) points out, “In the case of the smallest and the greatest happiness, it is always just one thing alone that makes happiness: the ability to forget” (pp. 88-89). Consequently, Miroslav Volf (2006) theorizes that some Christians psychologically may not wish to confront the guilt of the past, and would instead remain content by keeping the “present as their captive” (loc. 1736).

Despite these delimitations, there is hope. Karpen (2002) states that Jewish-Christian dialogue “has become commonplace” (p. 4); nonetheless, it is still challenging. Moreover, he posits that the events of the Shoah are “exercising a powerful transforming effect not only upon Judaism but also upon Christianity” (p. 205). Broad swaths of “the Christian Church have begun a process of abandoning the teaching of contempt” and have started to discard anti-Judaistic theological teachings (p. 205). Michael Kress (2012) views Jewish-Christian interaction as primarily improving because Christians have completely re-evaluated their “attitude toward Jews and Judaism” (para. 1).

The Christian re-evaluation of Judaism indeed has revolutionized the relationship between Jews and Christians. Kress further emphasizes that even though differences remain between them, contemporary Jews may reasonably expect for the first time in

history “that these differences will be addressed through interfaith dialogue rather than the violence of the past” (para. 2). Besides, Kress points out that during the Shoah, Christians played the role of “rescuers—people whose faith led them to risk their lives by hiding or otherwise saving Jews” (para. 4). The brave acts of these Christians do undeniably provide a significant connection between Jew and Christian; “however, the role of Christians and Christianity in perpetuating the Shoah remains a point of contention between the two religions” (Kress, 2012, para. 4). Interfaith dialogue among Jews and Christians is routine and ongoing; even so, it continues to be strained and inhibited due to factors, such as the Shoah and the Christian response to it.

### Christian Response

How should Christians respond today to the Shoah? Kapren argues for the need for “an ethic of remembering” and maintains that there needs to be “a way to place memory [of the Shoah] closer to the heart of Christianity” (p. 205). Du Preez (1985) suggests that “neighbourly (sic) love is ‘justice-love,’ love that acts justly” (p. 37). Waldron Scott (1980) indicates that G-d “is concerned about social justice, not mere private morality” (p. 49). Glasser and McGavran (1983) echo this viewpoint and conclude that G-d “is strongly moved by the cries of the oppressed, particularly when his people collectively make no effort to relieve their anguish” (p. 35).

Justice acts because it loves because it cares. Peck (2012) theorizes that love is more than emotion and states that love is “an act of will—namely, both an intention and an action” (Peck, 2012, p. 83, loc. 1078). Christians are not only to be morally upright people, but they are to love others and be compassionate, i.e., be “with the victims” as Metz (1978) infers. Christians must remember that innocent Jews were unjustly treated,

persecuted, and murdered, while, for the most part, the Christian community stood by silent and idle, effectively doing nothing. How can Christians actively remember and bring the memory of what happened to European Jews closer to their hearts? How does a Christian speak in this day to the injustice of the Shoah and the indifference toward it?

### **Problem Statement**

Due to the long-standing tensions resulting from the Shoah and the remaining gulf that separates Jews and Christians concerning the person of Jesus Christ, a complex and challenging relationship exists between these two religious faith groups. Consequently, Jews and Christians struggle to engage each other in meaningful dialogue that possibly could lead to forgiveness and reconciliation.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to describe the process of how acts of loving-kindness (mercy), as demonstrated and encountered through the work of The Matzevah Foundation in caring for and restoring Jewish cemeteries in Poland, have influenced dialogue (or lack thereof) among Jews and Christians. The study explored mercy as the language of dialogue, and the organization that I lead, The Matzevah Foundation (TMF), illustrated that dialogue. Mercy may be operationalized and understood in terms of “loving acts” (Johnson, 2012, p. 127); loving acts may be corroborated by humane orientation, concern for others or compassion, charity, and altruism.

## **Research Questions**

In order to explore how those involved and those affected by the work of The Matzevah Foundation have developed in their relationship to one another, I pursued the following research questions:

1. How have Jews and Christians responded to the work of The Matzevah Foundation?
2. In what ways do Jews and Christians learn how to dialogue through their mutual interaction within the context of the work of The Matzevah Foundation?

## **Rationale for the Study**

### **Jewish Suffering**

For thousands of years, Jews have lived among non-Jews or Gentiles. Over these millennia, the Jewish community was distinctly different from those among whom they resided. They were culturally distinctive, non-assimilating, and frequently misunderstood. As noted previously, the Roman historian Tacitus considered them to be “evil strangers” in the Roman Empire. After the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, tension arose increasingly among Jews and Gentiles, as the Jewish sect incorporated more Gentiles into its midst. In time, this Jewish sect became more and more gentile, ultimately becoming what is known as Christianity.

Once the church became institutionalized, it became antagonistically opposed to its Jewish origins. Primarily in Europe, Jews became “*the others* and hated and feared as such” (Dreifuss et al., 2016b). Christianity embraced this hatred of the Jews, and in the 4th century, integrated it as a component of “the theological worldview of Christianity” (Dreifuss et al., 2016b). In time, the church began to label Jews as “Christ killers.”

Increasingly, as a result of their misguided beliefs, Christians began to persecute Jews primarily in Europe. For centuries, the Jews of Europe were marginalized, and at times, they were murdered in pogroms. All the while, they suffered much at the hands of their Christian neighbors.

### Tension and Mistrust

To be specific, the Shoah was a factor in disjoining further this complex and longstanding relationship. The Shoah represents, to some degree, according to Karpen (2002), “a culmination of centuries of anti-Jewish teachings and actions by the church” (p. 111). Even so, Karpen reasons that the Shoah is more than the terminal outcome of a particular path of history; it embodies “a break in history, a rupture, which may never be healed” (p. 111). The resulting fracture has led to separation, isolation, and token interaction between these two groups. Most critically, Karpen argues that “there can be no possibility of reconciliation,” unless the rupture—the breach is recognized and steps are taken toward healing this rift (p. 111). If Christians wish to heal the wound and close the breach between themselves and Jews, they must deal justly with past injustices, such as their legacy of anti-Semitism, anti-Judaism, and culpability in the Shoah. Likewise, individuals within the Jewish community should determine to what degree they wish to interact with Christians regarding these issues.

Jewish-Christian relations have been strained for centuries. Since a great deal of tension and mistrust exists between these two communities of faith, bridging this gap, or closing the fissure is not easily accomplished. Notwithstanding, some Christians are acknowledging the breach and are taking tangible steps toward dialogue and reconciliation. What steps are Christians taking? How might they address the



separateness that presently divides Jews and Christians? How might they bridge this gap and close the rift that exists in Jewish-Christian dialogue? Is the healing of past wounds that led to this rift even possible? How might this be accomplished? What would be the evidence that the breach or gap is being closed?

### Developing Trustworthiness

In light of such questions, this study seeks to explore in what ways the work of a particular group of Christians builds bridges and opens pathways for dialogue and reconciliation with the Jewish community of Polish origins through its work in caring for and restoring Jewish cemeteries in Poland. This particular group of Christians has been working with the Jewish community of Poland for more than a decade to overcome the evil of the past through what may be termed as “loving acts” (Johnson, 2012, p. 127). Their work in the Jewish cemeteries of Poland led them to establish The Matzevah Foundation (TMF) in 2010 as a non-profit corporation and public charity for two primary reasons: to educate the public about the Shoah and to care for and restore Jewish cemeteries in Poland. Through its twofold mission, TMF seeks to build relationships, as well as sow trust, and develop trustworthiness as a means to bridge the chasm and close the gap that separates Jews and Christians.

### The Possibility of Dialogue

Is Jewish and Christian dialogue possible within the construct of TMF? The purpose of TMF is to bring Jews and Christians together to work in the space of a Jewish cemetery in Poland, so that dialogue—more than interfaith dialogue and political apologies, may be experienced and developed through loving acts—loving-kindness, or acts of love, by caring for and restoring Jewish cemeteries in Poland. Dialogue is an

integral aspect of the work of TMF. For Jews and Christians to work with each other in restoring Jewish cemeteries in Poland, they must interrelate with one another.

Consequently, relationships and trust are built, and dialogue emerges.

Dialogue provides the opportunity for Jews and Christians, who are involved in Jewish cemetery restoration projects, to deal with and consider religious identities, motivations, and in due course, the damage brought about by the Nazi oppressors, and its present-day implications. The scars are still present; nonetheless, restoration and healing may emerge through Jews and Christians interacting and working with one another. The focus of this study, therefore, is the interaction of Jews and Christians along with the dialogue it may produce within the liminal space of the Jewish cemetery in Poland.

#### Viability of the Study

I have chosen a case study as an approach to conduct my research. In Chapter 3, I discuss my methodology thoroughly; however, in this section, I wish momentarily to cover a few critical considerations concerning my rationale in selecting the case study method as the vehicle of my research. Creswell (2013) indicates that case studies involve the study of a case, “the entire culture-sharing group in ethnography,” within the framework of “real-life, contemporary context or setting” (p. 97). The selected setting is chosen according to what is to be studied in the case and thereby defined or determined “within a bounded system” such as “time and place” (p. 97).

With these considerations in mind, the case is the work of The Matzevah Foundation, where Jews and Christians interact with each other within the liminal space of the Jewish cemetery in Poland. As they interact and work together, theoretically, changes in perspectives should develop as people move into liminality, i.e., a “real-life,

contemporary context.” Stepping into this liminal space requires a choice, and as such, Jews and Christians are, for the most part entering into an emerging expanse in which they must leave old ways of thinking and interacting and embrace new possibilities. When Jews and Christians set foot in the liminal space of the Jewish cemetery in Poland, they encountered the opportunity for and the reality of dialogue.

Creswell (2013) indicates that qualitative studies include multiple data sources, “such as interviews, observations, and documents” (p. 45). Other than these data sources, I also used photographs that I have made over the years in documenting my work. Using logic, I analyzed my data and looked for patterns attempting to identify “a set of comprehensive themes” from the data (p. 45).

Probably most important for me is the fact that Creswell (2013) specifies that qualitative inquiry allows researchers to hear and understand the voices of the participants and how they view the issues encountered in the interaction of Jews and Christians. Furthermore, he considers that qualitative studies are emergent, meaning the “initial plan for the research cannot be tightly prescribed,” which meant for me that whatever I planned to do in conducting my research changed, once I “[entered] the field” (p. 47).

Due to the subjectivity in my role as a qualitative researcher, I carry with me certain viewpoints, which informed my interpretation of my study’s results, and “what [I had] to gain from the study” (p. 47). It was my hope for this study, that I would be able to develop an overall “picture of the problem or issue” related to dialogue and the interaction of Jews and Christians within the context of my research as I attempted to identify “the complex interactions of factors” (p. 47) that emerged.

## Researching the Third Space

This investigation explored the interaction of Jew and Christian within the construct of the third space—the liminal space as encountered in the work of TMF within the Jewish cemeteries of Poland. I examined how people responded to the work of TMF and in what ways Jews and Christians learned to dialogue. Principally, I studied the responses of select participants individually and corporately to the same open-ended interview questions; however, other inquiries arose during the interview sessions. These queries were used to delve into the participants' experiences in working with TMF in its educational initiatives and its Jewish cemetery restoration projects in Poland. Beyond individual interviews, I employed two focus groups to gather collective responses to the same body of questions.

Moloney (2011) considers focus groups to be unique vehicles of research, which she believes them to be “sacred containers” (p. 71). Based on the work of Kitzinger and Farquhar, she describes them “as potentially a liminal space, in which participants can seize the opportunity to brave issues normally censored or not discussed” (p. 66). According to David Morgan (1988), the value of the focus group is its ability to elicit “material that would not come out in the participants' casual conversations or response to the researcher's preconceived questions” (p. 21). At its best, Moloney concludes that the focus group has the ability to illuminate a “depth of engagement and relationship that leads participants into the transformative potential of a liminal space” (p. 66). In this study, I think that the focus groups function as transformative, liminal spaces in which Jew and Christian are able to interact and dialogue freely about critical issues confronting them regarding the nature of the Jewish and Christian interaction.

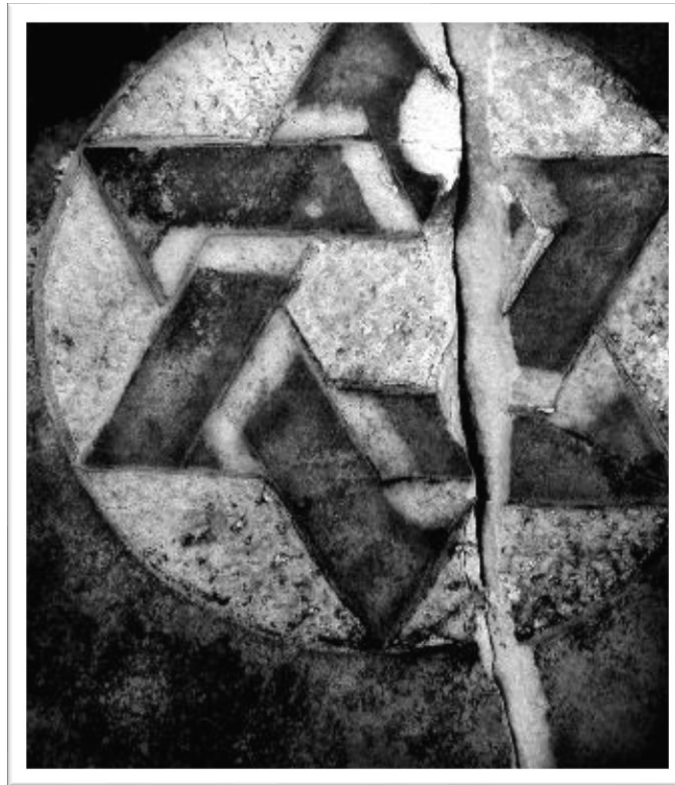
## The Importance of the Jewish Cemetery

When considering the nearly non-existent Jewish community in Poland, Annamaria Orla-Bukowska (2007) explains, “With so few direct [Jewish] heirs remaining, the physical and spiritual legacy of centuries of . . . coexistence had to be bequeathed upon the society as a whole” (p. 198). Subsequently, she determines that the Polish people became heirs of Jewish heritage, with “a right to benefit from alongside a responsibility to care for this inheritance” (p. 198). Thus, she views “the contributions of Polish non-Jews to Polish Jewish life” working in two dimensions: the first encompasses “efforts to restore and conserve the physical legacy (e.g., synagogues and cemeteries)” and the second entails “contributions of a psycho-spiritual type (e.g., tracing Jewish contributions to Poland’s history and culture, as well as commemorating Holocaust events)” (p. 200).

Photograph 2 of the shattered matzevah captures the fracture—the brokenness in the relationship of Jews and Christians, and eloquently bears witness, speaking of the unspeakable horrors of the Shoah. When considering what Orla-Bukowska proposes, the photograph also reflects an opportunity for Christians—non-Jews—to “care for [Jewish] inheritance” by restoring “the physical legacy” of Jewish life as represented by the Jewish cemetery, along with addressing the “psycho-spiritual” aspects of shattered Jewish life.

The matzevah itself is significant because, in the efforts of the Third Reich to liquidate Jews physically, it also desired to erase their presence culturally and spiritually from the landscape. The Nazis destroyed Jewish culture and religion by burning synagogues and desecrating Jewish cemeteries. They defiled the Jewish burial grounds by

removing *matzevot* and using them as building materials or demolished them where they stood. I see in the shattered matzevah hatred by those who willfully destroyed this standing memorial, and thereby desecrated the honor and memory of the deceased.



*Photograph 2. A Matzevah as a Headstone*

A shattered matzevah from the Jewish cemetery of Otwock, Poland speaks to the historical rupture of the Shoah. © Copyright 2006-2019 by Steven D. Reece.

From a religious point of view, why is caring for the Jewish cemeteries of Poland significant? To a Jew, based on the Torah and the *Halakhah*, caring for the dead is one of the highest expressions of love or loving-kindness, because the dead cannot repay you for your kindness shown to them. Such love or care may be understood as altruism, but it is more. The aspect of caring in view here is best expressed in Hebrew by the term

“*chesed*” (loving-kindness), or sometimes “*chesed shel-emet*” (true loving-kindness). We may understand this concept best by the term, *mercy*. The Jewish understanding of loving-kindness is derived from the Scriptures and is illustrated by G-d, who gave the Jews the pre-eminent example of what loving-kindness means when He buried Moses (Deuteronomy 34:5-6).

Since the Shoah decimated 3.5 million Polish Jews, approximately 200,000 survivors remained. Following the war in Poland, Jewish life was complicated. In 1968, the communist government of Poland forced many Jews to emigrate, and Jewish life in Poland nearly disappeared. Beginning in the early 1990s, Jewish life has re-emerged; nonetheless, very few descendants currently remain in Poland to care for the 1,200 Jewish cemeteries lying scattered across the countryside. Estimates place the number of Jews living in Poland today at roughly 10,000, who live mostly in the larger cities of Poland. Subsequently, caring for these cemeteries is an overwhelming task for the community of Polish Jews. Even so, caring for the dead is a *mitzvah*—a religious requirement fulfilling commandments from the Torah and *Halakhah*. Caring for the dead is seen as being one of the highest mitzvahs, which a Jew may perform.

I see an opportunity. I realize that as a Christian—a non-Jew, who lived and worked in Poland, I may speak to the injustice of the Shoah by caring for these Jewish cemeteries in Poland as a means to honor the memory of the Jewish victims of the Shoah. More so, however, I see an opportunity to work toward reconciliation seeking to restore the broken relationship that remains among Jews and Christians today. I desire to investigate and understand how Jews and Christians respond to the work of TMF, and in

what ways they learn to dialogue through mutually caring for Jewish cemeteries in Poland.

### **Conceptual and Theoretical Frameworks**

Qualitative inquiries are subjective investigations, which may be problematic for some investigators in the field of Shoah research due to the non-objective nature of its methodology. As a philosopher, I addressed aspects of Jewish-Christian interaction and dialogue, which may not be quantitatively analyzed, synthesized, collated, and “demonstrated empirically” (Knight, 2006, p. 6). My study sought to understand the phenomenon of Jewish-Christian dialogue within the context of the work of TMF that I lead in Poland in caring for Jewish cemeteries. I asked questions that related to meaning and purpose. I did not pursue hard data via correlations, statistical significance, or predictive factors. Instead, I attempted to understand how Jews and Christians interacted and learned to dialogue within the framework of TMF and its work. I think that my findings provide insights into the issues surrounding Jewish-Christian dialogue.

In what ways do Jews and Christians view the Shoah? Is dialogue possible? If so, what comprises it, and how is it realized? My approach to this investigation was guided by researchers, such as Karpen, Isaacs, Buber, Peck, and others. Their theories seemed to me to be the best ones that I met in my research.

Additionally, I think these theoretical approaches best enabled me to understand the data that I encountered and analyzed for my study. Nonetheless, I found results, which did not fit into the conceptual framework that I developed. My critical purpose in the research process was to determine how to understand best the data that I came across during the fieldwork and the data collection phase of my study. Consequently, I think that



it is relevant to outline my worldview briefly and present a few of these central hypotheses, which gave some direction for my research.

### My Basic Worldview

According to Anderson (2014), theism (non-Christian and Christian) holds to the understanding that “there is a real, objective distinction between good and evil,” which leads me to believe that there is “an ultimate standard of goodness in the universe” and G-d is that standard (p. 45). Sire (2009) indicates that G-d’s “goodness is expressed in two ways, through holiness and through love” (Sire, 2009, p. 30). For me, G-d’s righteousness and his love conceptually form the fundamental basis of my worldview understanding. My primary worldview assumption is that “God is good,” which is seen in two dimensions of his character, first “through holiness and through love” (Sire, 2009, p. 30). G-d’s holiness “emphasizes his righteousness,” and second, his love is directed toward “self-sacrifice and the full extension of his favor to his people” (Sire, 2009, p. 30). Furthermore, as Sire (2009) points out from these two aspects of G-d’s character, his person, we can conclude that “there is an absolute and personal standard of righteousness . . . and second, that there is hope for humanity” (p. 31).

Wilkins and Sanford (2009) conclude that my relationship with G-d and my knowledge of him should change me, transform me, literally reshaping, “the rearrangement of [my] identity, convictions, ethics, and actions” (p. 184). This latter consideration is a critical conceptual link for me and my work because my work is about transformation, literally redemption, or as they consider that redemption contains within it “the basic idea of restoration” (p. 196). My life’s work is to restore the broken relationship between Jew and Christian “to a new condition” (p. 196). Ultimately, what

will this “new condition” look like? I do not know. However, what I am learning at this point is that the work of restoration is a process and not a product.

### Liminal space

The names of victims are written on memorials—barriers, fences, and walls, and define the sphere of conflict between adversaries by what may be termed as “no man’s land.” Researchers refer to this space in between entities as liminal space, and the concept is referred to as liminality and was “created by Arnold Van Gennep (1909) and Victor Turner (1959)” (Auton-Cuff & Gruenhagen, 2014, p. 2). Liminality is a concept that “looks at tendencies of people in liminal spaces” (Auton-Cuff & Gruenhagen, 2014, p. 2) and describes being between or in the middle of two spaces, literally in-between the two—a third space. Liminal space, or liminality, may define the space between conflict and people, or what may be termed as disputed space or no man’s land.

### Loving Acts

The question of evil is not new. Humanity lives on a planet inhabited by corruption, which may be exemplified by the horrors birthed through such tragedies as the genocides of Rwanda and certainly the Shoah. I hope that Jews and Christians can come to terms with the past trauma brought about by long-term anti-Semitism, anti-Judaism, and the Shoah through dealing with such evil today by means of “loving acts.” Johnson (2012) considers that “Scott Peck is not alone in arguing that loving acts can overcome evil” (p. 127). Peck (2012) defines the concept of love in this manner: “Love is as love does. Love is an act of will—namely, both an intention and an action. Will also implies choice” (p. 83, loc. 1078). The concept of loving acts may be academically linked to humane orientation, and I deal with this notion more thoroughly in Chapter 2;

however, it is essential to emphasize that love acts. It is not passive. Compassion is an extension of love in action. The critical theoretical construction for my inquiry is that I think that compassionate acts lead to the opening and enriching of dialogue.

### Healing the Rupture

Karpen (2002) offers three key theoretical insights as to how Christians *might* conceptually respond to the Shoah. First, he argues for the need for “an ethic of remembering,” and second, he maintains that there needs to be “a way to place memory [of the Shoah] closer to the heart of Christianity” (p. 205). Third, by way of inference, he provides a glimpse as to how to remember and bring the memory of the Shoah “closer to the heart of Christianity” by working “together on the task of *tikkun olam*, the repair of the world” (p. 206).

Karpen’s three postulates provide for me a seedbed to root my hypothesis, which I am exploring as a means to bridge the chasm and close the gap between Jews and Christians. Briefly, I may reorder Karpen’s concepts and express them in this way: remembering, repairing the world, and bringing the memory closer to Christians by working together with Jews. In this manner, I may link Karpen’s concepts to the work of TMF, which is guided by three analogous principles: remembering, restoring, and reconciling.

### Dialogue

Generally, dialogue can be a confusing term. When dialogue comes to mind, most people think of a discussion; nonetheless, it can also mean a conversation, a verbal exchange between people, or it could be understood as spoken words or lines in a film, play, or radio program. Typically, dialogue is considered to be a discussion or a

conversation within a particular group of people. Dialogue is not a debate, and it is much more than a discussion. I do not consider interfaith dialogue as a part of this study.

Although invaluable, interreligious dialogue is more so institutionally experienced than relationally. Below, I will briefly consider dialogue and its conceptual theories related to my research.

Dialogue, according to Isaacs (1999), means “a shared inquiry, a way of thinking and reflecting together” (Isaacs, 1999, p. 9). In this light, Isaacs views dialogue as occurring in terms of a relationship with someone else, a person. He contends that dialogue is not about our “effort to make [that person] understand us;” it is about people coming “to a greater understanding about [themselves] and each other” (p. 9). This sort of interchange leads to new possibilities and outcomes that would challenge the existing status quo of Jewish and Christian dialogue. According to Kessler (2013), dialogue “begins with the individual, not with the community” (p. 53). For this reason, I may conclude that dialogue is a highly relational activity based on the interaction of individuals with each other.

Shady and Larson propose a model of dialogue based on the work of Martin Buber. In essence, their model advocates “a shared reality where all partners in the dialogue come to understand each other’s position, even if they do not entirely agree with it” (Shady & Larson, 2010, p. 83). The authors go on to explain the components and philosophies of Buber’s educational theory, identifying what Buber termed, “Between.” They state that the notion of between, according to Buber, is an “ontological category where the ‘meeting’ occurs” (Shady & Larson, 2010, p. 84). Buber (1955) defined between as being “the narrow ridge between subjective and objective where I and Thou

meet” (p. 204). It is at this point that inclusion occurs, and true dialogue begins. Once more, I may link the conceptual framework of liminal space with Buber’s concept of “Between” and dialogue.

Theoretically, dialogue should be possible among Jews and Christians. Dialogue should be probable during the interaction of Jews and Christians while working with each other in caring for Jewish cemeteries in Poland. Thus, dialogue may be facilitated by such acts of loving-kindness and may serve to bridge the chasm between Jew and Christian, allowing them to meet in the third space—the liminal space of the Jewish cemetery in Poland, where they may cooperate mutually in caring for and restoring Jewish cemeteries.

### **Significance of the Study**

First, this study should be of general interest to those researchers and professionals who work in the fields of social sciences, such as sociology, anthropology, archeology, history, education, political science, and psychology. It should be of interest to these researchers generally because my study deals broadly with human relations, education—transformational learning, ethical, or moral education, racial and religious conflict, contested histories and memory politics, and the stages in the development of ideologies that marginalize particular segments of society. For anthropologists, I explored cross-cultural and interreligious interaction, including the dynamics of relationship development and the factors that influence inter-human communication and dialogue. Archeologists may find my research interesting because it provides insights regarding how people over time interact with cultural and religious spaces, such as the Jewish cemetery.

Second, my study should be of some significance for investigators and specialists, who are responsible for developing and structuring social policy (human welfare and government). My investigation examined features of social justice, humane orientation, or concern for others in society.

Third, my research may be of moderate importance to researchers and experts working in the fields of Jewish studies, Shoah (Holocaust) research, and possibly forensic science. Several aspects of my study are relevant to those involved in Jewish studies. Chiefly, these aspects are Jewish cultural diplomacy, Jewish heritage preservation, and Jewish cultural stewardship. Although my research is not explicitly addressing the history of the Shoah, it is considering its contemporary aftermath. As a result of the Shoah, in what ways might the rupture that occurred in Jewish and Christian relations be healed, bridged, or closed is one of the primary features of this study. This study may also be of interest to forensic scientists because, to some degree, my research considers the pathology of genocide and its impact on ethnic groups and their culture.

Fourth, even though this study is not theological research, it should be of particular value to Christian and Jewish theologians, who are dedicated to researching interfaith relations and dialogue. One of the driving questions behind my study is in what ways should Christians respond to the Shoah. My response, as a Christian, was to seek dialogue and reconciliation with the Jewish community of Poland through caring for Jewish cemeteries. One concerning element present in the literature is the fact that many Christians and churches have done little to confront their complicity in the Shoah, or have demonstrated their longstanding racism (anti-Semitism) and their anti-Judaistic theological perspectives.

Fifth, this study should be highly significant for those researchers and practitioners who study Jewish-Christian relations, interfaith dialogue, dialogue, forgiveness, and reconciliation. In my research, I have encountered several academic theories related to forgiveness, reconciliation, and dialogue, which may be beneficial. Some of these theories will be discussed briefly below in the section Conceptual and Theoretical Frameworks. I studied the framework and process of reconciliation, including the prospect of forgiveness. I also addressed in what ways (or not) the perspectives of people changed from their cross-cultural and interfaith encounters.

Sixth, the study sought to understand in what ways people learned to dialogue in the context of TMF's work in caring for and restoring Jewish cemeteries in Poland.

#### Potential Contributions of Study to Dialogue

Since Jews and Christians generally have limited contact with each other at the peer level, I wanted to determine via my study in what ways dialogue is experienced as it relates to their mutual collaboration with TMF. I also explored whether or not dialogue occurs when Jews and Christians interact with each other while working together during a Jewish cemetery restoration project in Poland. Does any sort of framework for dialogue exist, or did it emerge? What factors influenced dialogue within the confines of TMF and its work? Jews and Christians cooperated to some degree during a Jewish cemetery restoration project. Did their interaction enable, or lead to dialogue? I discovered factors that influenced, facilitated, or contributed to dialogue among Jews and Christians working within the setting of TMF. Ultimately from my investigation of the work of TMF, a model emerged for Jewish-Christian dialogue.

## Benefits of this Study

More than a decade ago, I began to ask myself, as a Christian, this question: What should be my response to the Shoah? I started to explore ways in which I might respond, and I encountered the plight of Jewish cemeteries in Poland. I became interested in the possibility of reconciling Jews and Christian Poles through Jewish cemetery restoration projects. I began leading Baptist friends to join me in the work of caring for and restoring Jewish cemeteries in Poland as a means of pursuing Jewish-Christian reconciliation. Eventually, some of these Baptist friends assisted me in establishing TMF and became partners and co-laborers in this effort.

Initially, when I began this journey, I had a theoretical understanding of reconciliation and how I might approach the Jewish community, joining with them in caring for their cemeteries. However, I soon learned that I had no real practical idea as to how to go about it. I focused my initial efforts on developing relationships and trustworthiness. Dialogue began to emerge with a few significant Jewish people, and one person became a true friend. Most of what I did, I did instinctively; nevertheless, I wanted to understand. I was a practitioner who was experimenting, but I had no real theoretical framework from which to operate and grow in my understanding of Jewish-Christian dialogue, restoration, forgiveness, and reconciliation. For me, the importance of this study rests upon understanding more about the journey and exploring the work of TMF in remembering, restoring, and reconciling. I would like to explore and comprehend if I can, how dialogue works in the context of my work, and how it possibly might open a pathway toward forgiveness and reconciliation at some level or in some way among Jews and Christians.



As a leader, I realized that Jewish-Christian dialogue and reconciliation was not possible unless I led others to join me through mobilizing, engaging, and equipping them to care for and restore Jewish cemeteries in Poland. Some of those people, who joined me, helped me establish TMF. They have become friends, partners, and co-laborers on this journey of discovery. Collectively, we have become pioneers exploring the unknown space of conflict between us, as Christians, and the Jewish people.

This study should help TMF—my friends and co-laborers understand intellectually, philosophically, and compassionately the importance and meaning of our work, and its contributions to Jewish-Christian dialogue and reconciliation. This study should illuminate our pathway and provide insights and principles to guide us further in our efforts to pursue dialogue and reconciliation with Jews. This study should confirm that dialogue is possible in our work, and describe for us a model to guide us further along the path as we continue to pursue Jewish-Christian dialogue in our work with TMF.

Several years ago, one of my best Jewish friends and I were discussing my work with the Jewish community of Poland in caring for Jewish cemeteries. Szymon and I have known each other and worked together for many years. In reflecting on my work, he told me that what I was doing is unique. Continuing, he added, “What you are doing is building a bridge to the Jews. You have no guidebook, no example to follow, but you keep at it, learning as you go.” He paused a moment and declared, “We Jews should meet you halfway.”

My study should validate the bridge-building efforts of TMF, and thereby, affirm to the Jews the trustworthiness and sincerity of our efforts to span the breach and close the rift between us so that they would meet us halfway. André Gide (1973) writes, “One

doesn't discover new lands without consenting to lose sight, for a very long time, of the shore" (p. 353). Discovery requires risk and the willingness to leave behind what is known for the unknown. Through this study, Jews and Christians are exploring together unknown territories, learning how to dialogue, and opening new vistas for Jewish-Christian dialogue.

My research explored how mercy or acts of loving-kindness positively or negatively influence Jewish Christian dialogue. Generally, this study should be of potential value to the Jewish and Christian communities in terms of determining and outlining possible steps in facilitating Jewish and Christian dialogue, reconciliation, and probably forgiveness. Regarding real dialogue, this study should potentially demonstrate how to move beyond formal interfaith dialogue to a more organic interpersonal dialogue, which possibly could restore some aspects of relationships between Jews and Christians, embrace forgiveness, and reconciliation. The study should generate findings that may be transferable to other fields of research dealing with conflict, trauma, or acts of injustice.

#### Significant Theories for this Study

At this juncture, loving acts, dialogue, forgiveness, and reconciliation appear to be highly interrelated and integral to my study. In my literature review (Chapter 2), I develop more fully the research that I encountered concerning these concepts. However, I would like to elaborate momentarily on the importance of these theoretical approaches for my study. To begin with, it is essential to acknowledge evil and its impact on humanity. The Shoah was genocide on an industrial scale. If genocide is an ongoing occurrence among the nations, as it has been in Rwanda, Darfur, and most recently in

Myanmar amid the Rohingya Muslims, then it must indicate something inherently out of place within the nature of humanity.

Thus, an evil of such magnitude destroys relationships, and builds walls, creating a gulf, a chasm that separates men and women from each other. As such, there are perpetrators, bystanders, and victims. Undoubtedly, such a gulf exists between Jews and Christians, or among any group of people, which have suffered an injustice at the hand of a neighbor, or an enemy in any ethnic conflict or strife. Loving acts may be a critical theoretical framework with which to confront evil. Compassionate acts may lead to the opening and enriching of dialogue, which possibly could produce in the future forgiveness and reconciliation.

The responsibility for breaking the cycle of evil falls upon Christians. Flannery (1997) supports this view and argues that Christians need to “adopt the Jewish agenda” and take a step toward reconciliation (p. 3). If Christians engage in a significant and loving act, such as caring for neglected Jewish cemeteries in Poland, they may embrace something uniquely Jewish. Hopefully, this small step may lead to dialogue and possibly one day to breaking the cycle of evil, allowing forgiveness and reconciliation to emerge in the midst of Jewish and Christian communities.

As discussed previously, dialogue may be a confusing term for some people. Still, several academic theories clearly address dialogue utilizing several common theoretical elements. Dialogue, according to Isaacs (1999), means “a shared inquiry, a way of thinking and reflecting together” (Isaacs, 1999, p. 9). Shady and Larson (2010) point to Buber’s work in dialogue, which advocates “a shared reality where all partners in the dialogue come to understand each other’s position, even if they do not entirely agree with

it” (p. 83). The critical aspect of dialogue is realizing or perceiving new outcomes and an opening of the way to pursue them.

Forgiveness for Jews and Christians may be difficult to realize due to Jewish views concerning the complicity of Christians during the Shoah. Despite this reality, forgiveness is theoretically possible. Baskin and Enright (2004) and other researchers have developed a model based on moving through four phases they term: uncovering, decision, work, and deepening (p. 80). Johnson (2012) reasons that their model could assist “people forgive” (p. 130) and, when combined with loving acts, may break the cycle of evil. I may conceptually link Enright’s theoretical construct to my study as a means to explore the possibility of forgiveness.

Reconciliation for many Jews is an abstract concept. How possible is it for Jews and Christians to reconcile? Karpen (2002) infers a viable theoretical construct that shows promise in addressing this question. First, for him, remembering is a crucial concept. Remembering means “to put back together” (p. 9)—it is a form of reconstructing the past in the present. Healing for him cannot occur unless remembering the Shoah occurs. Within this framework, remembering leads to action and should give birth to restoration and healing. Second, Karpen links the Jewish concept of *Tikkun Olam* with the Christian notion of reconciliation in terms of “restoration of harmony” (p. 123). Remembering and restoration become essential concepts for this study.

Finally, Karpen defines reconciliation as meaning “not only ‘to restore to harmony’ but also, in the mathematical sense, ‘to account for’” (p. 9). For this study, I consider that the essential meaning of reconciliation for the short-term work of TMF, as reconnecting and bringing together disjointed elements by gathering Jews and Christians

together to care for and restore Jewish cemeteries in Poland. Reconciliation regarding how Karpen defines it is something that may emerge in the future from the work of TMF. However, such a possibility is beyond the focus of this study. Although Karpen does not link his concepts in this manner, I may infer the linkage of remembering, restoring, and reconciling as a potential theoretical pattern for this study.

### **Definitions of Key Terms**

*Compassion:* Showing concern or care for others is compassion. The Talmud considers compassion to be “the hallmark of an ethical person,” and it “is *the* defining characteristic of being a Jew” (Telushkin, 2006, p. 20). By being merciful or compassionate, we demonstrate that we care for what is valuable or meaningful to someone else, which could be an injustice, a misdeed, or emotional pain. The best way to show compassion is through a loving deed—an act of kindness in an attempt to make right what was wrong.

*Dialogue:* Kessler (2013) argues that the word “dialogue,” along with circumstances surrounding it, are not well demarcated (p. 52). To clarify the meaning of dialogue, it is essential to note what it is not. Dialogue is not a debate, nor a discussion. It is not centered on “making a decision” by ruling out options, which leads to “closure and completion” (Isaacs, 1999, p. 45). According to Isaacs, the root connotation of the meaning of decision means to “murder the alternative” (p. 45). Dialogue, on the other hand, does not rule out options. Instead, dialogue seeks to discover new options, which provide insight and a means by which to reorder knowledge, “particularly the taken-for-granted assumptions that people bring to the table” (Isaacs, 1999, p. 45).

Shady and Larson (2010) suggest that an operational understanding of dialogue may be derived from the work of Martin Buber, who saw the exchange of dialogue as a process, in which one person comes to understand the position of another person—the other, “while at the same time remaining rooted” in their own personal point of view (p. 82). Mainly, these authors conclude that Buber’s model advocates “a shared reality where all partners in the dialogue come to understand each other’s position, even if they do not entirely agree with it” (Shady & Larson, 2010, p. 83).

*Evil:* Peck (2012) posits that “evil is real,” and it “is not the figment of the imagination of a primitive religious mind feebly attempting to explain the unknown” (p. 277, loc. 3816). Furthermore, evil may be operationalized as “the exercise of political power—that is, the imposition of one’s will upon others by overt or covert coercion” (Peck, 2012, p. 278, loc. 3830).

*Forgiveness:* Forgiveness may be best understood when one person decides to forgive an offense or to cancel the debt of some offender. According to Newman (1987), “forgiveness is essentially a restorative process, an attempt to repair a breach in the relationship between two parties” (p. 157). If forgiveness is a restorative act, it should lead to reconciliation, which, by its very nature, means to restore a relationship to its original state (Newman, 1987, p. 157).

An operational understanding of forgiveness may be understood by combining two slightly differing definitions. Baskin and Enright (2004) define forgiveness “as the willful giving up of resentment in the face of another’s (or others’) considerable injustice and responding with beneficence to the offender even though that offender has no right to

the forgiver's moral goodness" (p. 80). Waldron and Kelley (2008) also view forgiveness as a

relational process whereby harmful conduct is acknowledged by one or both partners; the harmed partner extends undeserved mercy to the perceived transgressor; one or both partners experience a transformation from negative to positive psychological states, and the meaning of the relationship is renegotiated, with the possibility of reconciliation (p. 5).

*Genocide*: The term genocide "did not exist before 1944" (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2018b, para. 1). According to Boghossian (2010), the term genocide was "coined by the Polish jurist Raphael Lemkin in the 1940s" (p. 70). As a word, genocide is comprised of two parts: *genos*, a Greek term meaning people, and *cide* a Latin phrase meaning murder. Lemkin combined these two terms to mean, "the murder of a people" (p. 70). The term specifically refers to "violent crimes committed against groups with the intent to destroy the existence of the group" (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2018b, para. 1).

*G-d*: I will follow the Jewish practice suggested by Manosevitz (2010) of not pronouncing the "name of the Divine," and I will, therefore, "use the spelling G-d" (p. 55) unless quoted from a source, which uses "God."

*Halakhah*: The *Halakhah* is composed of the 613 commandments, or *mitzvot*, comprising Jewish religious law. Keeping a commandment in Judaism is considered a *mitzvah*, or a righteous act. Many Jews view keeping a mitzvah as a good deed. The plural of *mitzvah* is *mitzvot*. The *Halakhah* is divided into two parts: laws/*mitzvot* drawn directly from the Torah and laws/*mitzvot* arising from rabbinical exegesis inferred in the Torah. Wolf (2010a) traces the etymology of the Hebrew word, *Halakhah* (also transliterated as *halakah* and *halakoth*). He states that it originates from the Hebrew root, *halakot* means "ways of the oral tradition" and is associated with the word *halak*, which

describes “how one should walk;” moreover, Wolf explains that the purpose of the *Halakhah* “was to define Jewish identity in contrast to the surrounding nations” (p. 32).

*Humane Orientation*: Describes the level “to which individuals in organizations or societies encourage and reward individuals for being fair, altruistic, friendly, generous, caring, and kind to others” (Javidan & Dastmalchian, 2009). Kabaskal and Bodur (2004) explain further that “this dimension is manifested in the way people treat one another and in the social programs institutionalized within each society” (p. 569). Simply stated, humane orientation is concerned with the welfare of humanity.

*Interfaith Dialogue*: Karpen (2002) regards interfaith dialogue occurring on two levels: theoretical and macro. Pointing to the work of Novak in 1998, and Cunningham and Star in 1998, Karpen posits that interfaith dialogue transpires commonly “either on the theoretical level,” which contemplates prospective or appropriate theological issues, or it focuses “on the macro level,” in which discussion is conducted “among religious elites or denominations” (p. 4). I conclude the former is a theological discussion and the latter as an interfaith exchange or discourse among institutions. Although imperative, interreligious dialogue is not directly encountered in this study.

*Jewish Cemetery*: Burial grounds in Jewish life and particularly in religious practice, are viewed differently and are considered to be holy places. In Hebrew, various terms refer to burial grounds or cemeteries; the main ones are “*Bet Kevarot* ‘house of graves’, *Bet Hayim* ‘house of life,’ or *Bet Olam* ‘house of eternity’” (Kadish, 2011, p. 59). In my association and work with *Komisja Rabiniczna do Spraw Cmentarzy w Polsce* (RCC in Poland), I primarily encounter in Hebrew, *Beit Chaim*, which in Polish is *Dom Żywych*, or “the house of the living.”



*Jewish-Christian Relations:* Jewish-Christian relations are a product of the Twentieth Century, especially since the Shoah. Kessler (2013) argues that Jewish-Christian relations should be considered apart from Jewish-Christian dialogue. He states that the notion of Jewish-Christian relations applies to “the whole history and significance of the contact of Jews and Christians,” which includes “the positive contacts and influence upon each other” (p. 52). Kessler additionally suggests that it could “also include the external influences upon each [group], or the question as to how each will fare in the modern world” (p. 52). On the other hand Jewish-Christian dialogue, he asserts “is a subset of relations, . . . and is predicated on the need for reconciliation between the two faiths, and is generally founded upon theological issues” (Kessler, 2013, p. 52).

*Love:* Scott Peck (2012) hypothesizes that love is more than a feeling or an emotion. He considers love to be “an act of will—namely, both an intention and an action” (Peck, 2012, p. 83, loc. 1078).

*Matzevah (מצבה):* *Matzevah* is a Hebrew term, which designates a memorial stone or monument that is erected in memory of a significant event or placed at the foot of a grave. In Jewish cemeteries, the headstone or *matzevah* signifies remembering and honoring the deceased and ensures that the grave will not be desecrated.

*Mercy:* Mercy is derived from the Hebrew word, *chesed*, which means treating others with kindness, or more accurately with loving-kindness; it may be expressed as, *chesed shel-emet*, meaning (חסד של אמת) literally “kindness of truth” or true loving-kindness (Sienna, 2006, p. 79). Mercy may be operationalized and understood in terms of “loving acts” (Johnson, 2012, p. 127);

*Reconciliation:* Miroslav Volf (2000) considers reconciliation to have more than a theological meaning, which most Christian theologians understand as the “reconciliation of the individual and God” (p. 162). Nevertheless, Volf maintains that justice should be understood “as a dimension of the pursuit of reconciliation, whose ultimate goal is a community of love” (p. 163). Furthermore, he correctly reasons that reconciliation has a vertical dimension (between God and humanity) and a horizontal dimension (among men and women) and concludes that without this “horizontal dimension reconciliation would simply not exist” (p. 166).

*Restoration:* Restoration is a concept in which something becomes “corrupt and is restored to a new condition” (Wilkins & Sanford, 2009, p. 196). The idea of restoration is related to redemption, which means to redeem or to repurchase something or to regain possession of something through paying a price.

*Shoah:* Unless citing a source that uses the term Holocaust, I will use the Hebrew term, *Shoah* (catastrophe or destruction), to define the events of what many refer to as the Holocaust. I make this distinction for three reasons. First, the “biblical Hebrew term *Sho'ah* (“disaster,” e.g., Isa 10:3 and 47:11) conveys the enormity and particularity of the Third Reich’s destruction of European Jewry” (Washington, 2000, p. 135). Second, as Manosevitz (2010) emphasizes, the term Shoah is “used by modern scholars in reference to that event,” and third, the word, Holocaust, is a Greek word that means “burnt offering,” which according to Manosevitz extends some “religious significance” to the event, adding that “there was nothing religious about Hitler’s ‘Final Solution’” (p. 55).

*Tikkun Olam:* *Tikkun Olam* is a Jewish concept centered on the notion of restoring, restorative works, healing, which means in Hebrew “repair of the world”

(Sucharov, 2011, p. 172). In contemporary times, “*Tikkun Olam* has come to connote an ethical outlook by which we strive to create a better world” (Sucharov, 2011, p. 174). Furthermore, restorative work or repair is viewed as “a process that extends beyond the bounds of the dyadic [interaction of two people] field to include the surrounding world context” (Sucharov, 2011, p. 175).

### **Assumptions**

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel (1996b) writes, “There is immense silent agony in the world, and the task of man is to be a voice for the plundered poor” (loc. 4790). The poor to which he is referring are those without a voice, powerless, and marginalized in society. Consequently, regarding morality, Heschel argues, “Morally speaking, there is no limit to the concern one must feel for the suffering of human beings” (loc. 4793), and “indifference to evil is worse than evil itself” (loc. 4782). Furthermore, he asserts, “In a free society, some are guilty, but all are responsible” (Heschel, 1996a, loc. 8042).

I assume that we are responsible for dealing with the evil of the Shoah and its aftermath. Heschel is saying that “the task of man is to be a voice” for those who have no voice. For me, this means that all men and women, irrespective of beliefs, are to be a voice and speak to the injustice of the Shoah. Christians and Jews are to be a voice for human beings, who were exterminated by the Third Reich during the Shoah. Subsequently, remembering, as a form of empathy, should lead to genuine acts, or taking action on behalf of the victims of injustice.

The Nobel Prize-winning, French author André Gide (2017) penned these words: “True kindness presupposes the faculty of imagining as one’s own the suffering and joys of others” (p. 313). I assume in this study that people, human beings, possess the capacity

to understand, as their own, the plight and wellbeing of other people. In essence, I assume that people recognize the needs of other people and can be kind and compassionate to one another.

Joseph B. Soloveitchik (1964) postulated that Jews have always been part of humanity, and for this reason, they are “committed to the general welfare and progress of mankind,” desiring to combat disease and “in alleviating human suffering, in protecting man’s rights, in helping the needy, *et cetera*” (pp. 20-21). As a Christian, one of my conceptual frameworks is that I am commanded to love G-d and to love others in G-d’s creation. Consequently, I am to work toward restoring the brokenness in this world. Compassion is an expression of love. Moreover, as we know, love acts for the betterment of the object of its desire.

I assume that Jews and Christians are concerned about humanity and should act accordingly. In practice, I encounter the reality of indifference toward the Shoah among both Jews and Christians, and consequently, they are unwilling to address it today for many reasons. My purpose is not to discuss the reasons for their indifference, but to consider what is needed for my study to be successful. I need people—both Jews and Christians, to be compassionate, or concerned enough to join me and participate in caring for and restoring at least one Jewish cemetery in Poland so that I might conduct my study.

I also assume that Jews and Christians should be willing to engage with one another to the degree that dialogue may emerge. People have a choice. I believe people are interested in the work of TMF and desire to understand the potential of Jewish-Christian interaction, dialogue, and potentially forgiveness and reconciliation. I assume

that Jews and Christians are curious about each other and would be willing to explore these issues mutually, as a means to heal or restore the rift between them.

I have several assumptions regarding how I should conduct this study.

Undoubtedly, I will be dealing with people who have been hurt or impacted in some way as a result of the Shoah. I will be working with Jewish descendants, many of whom lost significant portions of their families during the war and the Shoah. Some of the Christians who may be a part of this study may have friends and relatives who are Jewish and may also have emotional reactions during the study. For these reasons, I must assume that I may encounter a broad range of emotions, including anger, fear, sadness, and even hatred. I will need to be prepared to allow people to express their feelings. If need be, I have arranged for a psychiatrist to be available for counseling.

Additionally, I assume that people, whom I interview either individually, or corporately, will answer the questions truthfully. I hope that people will give me truthful answers about what they think. I need participants in my study, to be honest with me. Otherwise, my investigation will have little research value. Last, as I conduct this study, I will be asking open-ended questions, so I will receive a broad range of responses, which may or may not be pertinent to this study. Subsequently, I will give people space and allow them to explore their feelings, even if what they are expressing is not related to my research.

## **Methodology**

This study was conducted as a qualitative case study of the work of The Matzevah Foundation (TMF) employing a purposeful sampling method that selected specific people who have interacted with or who have had contact with TMF and its work in Poland or

the United States. TMF embraces in its Jewish cemetery restoration projects a diverse group of volunteers, including Polish Jews, Jews of Polish descent, Polish Catholics, Evangelical Christians, and non-believers. Project participants are not just Americans but are international residing not only in Poland but are from countries such as Germany, Austria, Ukraine, and Israel.

TMF also works with community and governmental leaders in Poland and has developed collaborative partnerships with Jewish institutions in the U.S. and Poland. What connects this diverse group of people primarily is the work of caring for a neglected Jewish cemetery in Poland. Typically, volunteers are involved in an intensive week of labor in which they experience first-hand the loss of the Shoah by cleaning or removing debris and restoring some aspect of the cemetery. Usually, volunteers spend free time together, such as going for coffee or in structured seminars where difficult issues are explored.

Sources of data for this case study were derived from direct observations of participants, interviews, participant-observation, and documents/artifacts such as printed articles, photographs, emails, and personal reflective journals. Ideally, a case study should interview roughly 12 to 14 people. I interviewed fifteen people individually in face-to-face interviews and corporately in two field-based focus groups. Of the interviewees, four were board members of TMF and included one long-term Polish-Christian volunteer in the work of TMF. This group of five people is all Christians. I interviewed four Jewish partners with whom I have worked most closely; all are leaders in the Jewish community, in either the U.S. or Poland. Finally, as noted above, I employed two focus groups as a means to question a group of people about their

involvement with TMF. Each focus group contained four participants and was conducted during Jewish cemetery restoration projects in Poland. The first focus group consisted of one TMF board member and three first-time participants in a TMF Jewish cemetery restoration project. The second focus group was also conducted during a field project and consisted of three volunteers—two Jewish and one Christian and also included one TMF board member.

Through inquiry of the interaction of Jews and Christians within the construct of the third space [liminal space] of the work of TMF, I sought to understand how *gemilut chasadim* or acts of loving-kindness (mercy) influenced attitudes and created mutual bridges of understanding as to the underpinning for dialogue. Principally, I studied the responses of people individually and corporately to open-ended questions about their experiences in working with TMF in its educational initiatives and its Jewish cemetery restoration projects in Poland. Focus groups were employed as a means of inquiry; Moloney (2011) identifies as a focus group as a “sacred container,” (p. 71) that functions as a transformative, liminal space. Within the focus group, Jews, Christians, and other individuals may interact and dialogue more freely about critical issues confronting them.

### **Limitations of the Study**

Primarily, the limitations of this study, which could potentially restrict the outcome of the investigation, are:

1. The study is limited by the availability, transparency, and honesty of the participants.
2. Language and cultural issues may limit the study.
3. The study may be limited by my own bias.

First of all, this was a qualitative study, in which I used open-ended questions for interviews individually and corporately (See Individual and Focus Group Interview Protocol in Appendix E). Since the response of participants was reflective, some answers may be irrelevant and obscure. Moreover, some participants may not have been as forthcoming with their responses. Second, language and cultural barriers may have been factors for some participants because English was not their first language. Interview questions for individuals and focus groups were prepared in English.

Nevertheless, when necessary for Polish participants, interview questions were translated on the spot as needed to facilitate the interview and discussion process for the researcher. Differing cultural values may have influenced the operational understanding of mercy. Both language and cultural issues may have also produced weak data, or potentially the data could be held suspect or may not be considered strong enough, thereby weakening the validity of the study.

Finally, as the researcher, I was a participant-observer, and it must be noted that I am deeply involved in the work of TMF, as its founder and chief executive officer. Consequently, my personal bias may have limited this study; nevertheless, I have taken several strategic steps to overcome my prejudice, and thereby ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of this study. I will address bias issues and how I planned to overcome them more explicitly in Chapter 3, in the section titled Validation Strategies.

### **Delimitations of the Study**

The delimitations for this study are:

1. The Matzevah Foundation was used as the case that I am explored for this study.



2. Participants were purposefully selected based on their knowledge of TMF and its work.

First, since I am the founder and president/CEO of TMF, I have a vast knowledge of its history and activities. As I have shared previously, TMF grew out of my work with the Jewish community of Poland in caring for and restoring Jewish cemeteries. My formal cooperation with the Jewish community of Poland began in March of 2005. In December 2010, I established TMF with a group of Christian friends, with whom I had been cooperating in caring for and restoring Jewish cemeteries since 2005. Furthermore, due to my role, I have developed considerable trust and credibility with the Jewish community of Poland.

Consequently, I have had direct access to the Jewish community and the work of TMF. Nonetheless, my access was not misused. I secured formal consent from the individuals that I interviewed and from those who participated in the focus groups, whether they were from the Jewish community, volunteers, or TMF.

Second, sampling for this case study was purposeful, meaning that I chose specific people, principally Jews and Christians, who have interacted with the work of TMF in some capacity, whether in Poland, the U.S., or elsewhere. The selection of these participants was based on the criterion of choosing the participants, who have the best information about TMF. Interviews and focus groups were conducted in Poland or the US and were conducted either in the context of a Jewish cemetery restoration project or in a church, synagogue, or an institution with whom TMF interacts. Some participants were selected for individual interviews, while other individuals were interviewed within the construct of a focus group.

## Summary

The Shoah and its evil undermined and stressed an already tense and complicated relationship between the Jewish and Christian communities. Due to the tension and mistrust that exists between these communities, a means to bridge the gap and open a meaningful dialogue is needed that could lead to forgiveness and possibly reconciliation. A group of Christians began to build a bridge to the Jewish community of Warsaw by caring for and restoring Jewish cemeteries of Poland more than a decade ago. This group of Christians established The Matzevah Foundation in 2010 as a means to continue their mission by educating the public about the Shoah and by caring for and restoring Jewish cemeteries in Poland.

The theoretical basis of my inquiry primarily flowed from my worldview, and theories of dialogue, liminal space, loving acts, healing the rupture, and others. I will discuss further these concepts and others in Chapter 2. What I hope to convey at this point is that these theories have given me some ideas regarding how I might conduct my study.

Through using the methodology of a case study, I explored the broader perspective of my work in leading The Matzevah Foundation and its interaction with the Jewish community of Polish origins in how Jews and Christians learned to dialogue within the liminal space of a Jewish cemetery in Poland. Through the inquiry of Jews, Christians, and others, I sought to understand how the work of The Matzevah Foundation facilitated or hampered the interaction of Jews and Christians, whether or not dialogue was possible, and in what way attitudes were influenced and possibly changed among those, who interacted with The Matzevah Foundation.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### **Introduction**

The impetus of my work in leading TMF is to bridge the gap in the broken relationship between Jew and Christian through dialogue. As I indicated in Chapter 1, Jews and Christians struggle to interact due to the longstanding history of misbelief, mistreatment, and mistrust. Their interaction has been hampered by conflict and the historical rupture of the Shoah. Even though Christians have attempted addressing the rift, much is yet to be done. What steps have been taken, or accomplished? Are these steps enough? Are they adequate? Has reconciliation truly transpired? Or is it an abstract and unattainable reality?

My research indicates that some progress is being made at the institutional level, but very little is taking place at the grassroots level, or peer-to-peer interaction. Is it possible to do more to change the existing assumptions that exist in the Christian and Jewish communities regarding the “other?” I think that the work with TMF possibly could create a space, a third space, in which Jew and Christian may experience the other in a uniquely different manner, which may open the way toward dialogue, forgiveness, and ultimately reconciliation.

The literature review will demonstrate the lack of research, which currently exists that directly addresses a means of dealing with the conflict at the relational level, and at

times, the challenging relationship that exists between Jews and Christians. I will explore four broad themes in the academic literature, which include (a) a history of Jewish-Christian conflict, (b) overcoming Jewish-Christian strife, (c) moral foundations, and (d) transformation of assumptions. Each of these four themes will be further dissected and reviewed.

### **Purpose and Organization**

First, this literature review will explore several issues surrounding the conflict, such as factors that led to the Shoah. Second, it will discuss overcoming Jewish-Christian discord, contemporary Christian response to the Shoah, and institutional efforts regarding Jewish-Christian dialogue. Third, it will address commonly held moral and religious foundations, along with considering academic, moral parallels, breaking the cycle of evil, and reconciliation. Fourth, the transformation of assumptions will be examined through the lenses of theories concerning dialogue, liminal space, and transformational learning. Fifth, in my search of the literature, numerous studies have been conducted in the area of Jewish-Christian relations, but very few concerning Jewish-Christian dialogue—especially at the relational level. I discovered seven qualitative articles examining Jewish-Christian relations, while I encountered three quantitative studies investigating the same topic. I found one study addressing Jewish-Christian dialogue and a dissertation that considered reconciliation.

Due to misguided beliefs, Jewish-Christian relations have been strained since the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. The events of the Shoah have only deepened and extended the chasm that exists between Jew and Christian. Some groups of Jews and Christians have entered dialogue on a formal and primarily institutional level, as represented by the

International Council of Christians and Jews (ICCJ). Other groups have begun an interfaith dialogue more so locally via inter-congregational educational programs (e.g., Karpen, 2002; O'Keefe, 2010), while some individual Jews and Christians are pursuing dialogue (e.g., Karpen, 2002).

Mostly among many Jews, the common perception of Christians is that they are somehow culpable for the injustice committed against them by Nazi Germany, and as such, ostensibly have no desire to enter into dialogue with Christians. How might Christians bridge this gulf and overcome such a perception, and deal with the injustice of the Shoah? How might Christians open a dialogue with Jews that possibly could lead to forgiveness and reconciliation? These questions broadly frame the issue that I would like to explore in my study concerning Jewish-Christian dialogue.

More narrowly, the focus of my research embraces the questions: how have Jews and Christians responded to the work of TMF, and in what ways do they learn to dialogue? The research concerning TMF centers on a means of developing and enriching dialogue that perhaps could lead to the transformation of the status quo in the relationship of Jew and Christian, which could be understood as forgiveness and reconciliation between these two disparate entities. Hopefully, Jews and Christians can come to terms with the past pain related to the Shoah by confronting, acknowledging, and overcoming its evil through “loving acts.” Johnson (2012) points to Scott Peck (1978, 2012), who argues that “loving acts can overcome evil” (p. 127). As a result of intentional, overt actions of compassion and kindness, the possibility of forgiveness may emerge, ultimately leading to forgiveness and reconciliation.

## History of Jewish-Christian Conflict

The first section of the literature review considers the history of Jewish and Christian conflict, principally anti-Semitism and anti-Judaism; and then reviews factors that led up to the Shoah along with the significant events of the Shoah itself. The seeds of destruction that produced the Shoah were sown long before the unfolding of the mass murder of millions of innocent Jews.

### Seeds of Hatred

The first kernel of destruction centered on the Jewish figure of Jesus Christ, which according to Bauer (2001) produced the “false myth” that “the Jews” murdered Jesus, which fashioned “one of the most destructive and murderous legends in human history” (p. 20). Christian anti-Semites embraced this false myth and promulgated it over the centuries whipping “up passion and aggression against a whole people and their civilization” (p. 20), meaning the Jews. Primarily in Europe, Jews became “*the others* and hated and feared as such” (Dreifuss et al., 2016b). Christianity embraced this hatred of the Jews, and in the 4th century, integrated it as a component of “the theological worldview of Christianity” (Dreifuss et al., 2016b), which shaped Christian polity negatively.

Traditional Christian anti-Judaism perceives Jewish difficulties as punishment for rejecting Jesus Christ as the Messiah and for murdering him. Additionally, Bauer (2001) considers that this conventional view incorporates into its myth the element of “economic misbehavior” by the Jews and “in more extreme cases the myth of the Jew’s ‘desire to control the world’” (p. 48). Such a traditional anti-Semitic view is stereotypical and rests upon “resentment and hatred,” focusing on Jews generally and not specifically on actual

Jewish people living in Jewish communities (p. 48). Summarizing the traditional view of Christian anti-Judaism, Bauer concludes that “as only a people possessed by the Devil could have killed God, Jews and Judaism were often seen as the work or the symbol of Satan” (p. 48).

According to Houtepen (2004), hatred of this sort is not merely racial anti-Semitism, but it is “a definite and conscious *banning or curse* of the Jews, based on theological presuppositions” (p. 208). Fackenheim (2002) says that he has “no choice but to see” the destruction of the Jews of Europe as being “racism-in-general;” even so, he distinguishes the events of the Shoah “as a unique and ultimate assault on *Jewish faith*,—nay, *on the God of Israel*” (para. 22). It is critical to understand the nature of dyadic hatred and how it functions morally to alienate, marginalize, and exclude a particular group of people. When racial hatred and theological condemnation are linked, it enables and justifies the removal from the social order, the other—the stranger, the alien, or the one among us, who does not fit the norm or the accepted status quo of our community.

Waller argues that “the fusion of religious belief systems with ethnic, national, and political identities” provides people with the “theological justifications for ‘us-them’ thinking by constricting the churches’ universe of moral obligation” (p. 141). For the institutional church in Christian Germany and Europe, the implications were principally to maintain its status quo position and influence in society. Essentially, this meant that the institutional church in Germany did not choose “justice”—doing the right thing by their neighbors, the Jews, but instead chose to do what was politically pragmatic or expedient for the Nazi Party, and the State of Germany. The political and moral choices of the institutional church in the run-up to the Shoah allowed the Jews to become marginalized

and remain “entirely outside the realm of moral obligation for perpetrators” (Waller, 2007, p. 149). Waller concludes that “ultimately, the product of such mythologies and ideologies” define the institutional Christian church culture, as “us” and “them,” which leads to victims being excommunicated and removed “from the perpetrators’ moral universe” (p. 143).

The second seed of destruction was that of pogroms—organized massacres, particularly of Jews (Merriam-Webster, 2012). According to Bauer, these pogroms were executed upon the Jews of Europe during the Middle Ages as they “wandered from place to place in Christendom in search of a haven,” but only found sanctuary in Poland as they “were brutally expelled” from all other countries (Bauer, 2001, p. 23). Bauer states that massacres of Jews occurred in Germany in 1196, England in 1290, and “throughout Europe during the Black Death epidemic in 1347 – 50” (p. 23).

In response to their persecution at the hands of their Christian neighbors, Bauer determines that Jews turned inwardly, concentrating on prayer, studying Torah and traditions, and “developing the richness of the interpretative moral story (sing., *midrash*; pl., *midrashim*)” along with an increasing concern “with political life” (p. 23). Bauer concludes that such an inward turn that enriched “the spiritual and social life of the [Jewish] community, was probably the salvation of the Jews,” as it produced a “rich social and intellectual inner world” allowing the Jews “to face hostile external reality” (p. 24).

The third seed of destruction arose from the advent of Islam and the Muslim campaign to conquer and convert Europe to Islam. Bauer argues that to their Muslim conquerors, Christians and Jews were considered not as pagans but as “People of the



Book,” and were consequently seen “as a notch higher than the pagans;” nonetheless, the war raged against them to convert to Islam (p. 25). Jews were also massacred “under Moslem rule” in Spain (1010, 1013, and 1066), Yemen (1627 – 29), in Iran (1826), and “under Turkish rule in Damascus in 1840” (p. 25).

The fourth seed of destruction was the collapse of Christendom and its division into Catholic and Protestant factions, which as Bauer concludes “did not aid the Jews,” as Protestant Lutherans were “rabidly hostile” toward the Jews because they would not “accept their new religion” (p. 33). Larry E. Axel (1979) echoes Bauer’s conclusion about Protestant antagonism toward the Jews. Axel claims that Martin Luther, one of the leaders of the Protestant Reformation, advocated that Jewish synagogues should be burned, Jewish homes should be “broken down and destroyed,” Jewish prayer books and Talmuds should be confiscated, and finally that “their rabbis must be forbidden under threat of death to teach anymore” (p. 129). Against such a backdrop, there later emerged the philosophical age of enlightenment in which philosophers such as Francois-Marie de Voltaire expressed an anti-Jewish philosophy that “did not differ materially from the extreme anti-Jewishness of St. John Chrysostom” (Bauer, 2001, p. 35).

#### Factors Leading to the Shoah

Bauer (2001) argues first that the Third Reich’s policies regarding the Jewish question were not well defined and were not worked out until “*after* Kristallnacht”—the night of broken glass, which occurred on the night of 9-10 November 1938. Bauer concludes that this “pogrom itself can hardly be considered as a way-station to the Holocaust in terms of a planned policy” (p. 117). Second, the Jews had to pay an enormous fine to the Nazi party as a result of the death Ernst vom Rath, a German

embassy official in Paris, who was shot on 7 November 1938 by Herschel Grzynszpan. Grzynszpan, a Polish Jew and whose parents were deported from Germany to Poland, acted in retribution against the deportation by the Gestapo in October 1938 of non-German Jews, who were Polish nationals. Third, the Jews were “finally and totally evicted from German economic life” after Kristallnacht effectively eliminating the employment of Jews (p. 117), opening the way for the Nazis to develop the final solution to the Jewish question.

In January 1933, Adolf Hitler became the Chancellor of Germany and began the radical transformation of Germany. His plan was simple: nullify the undesirables—concentration camps for political prisoners and mentally ill, multiply the desirables—*Lebensborn*—maternity homes run by the SS (Kampf, 2013, p. 23) relying upon eugenics for biologically and racially pure Aryan traits. And finally, liquidate the barriers (thus, discriminatory actions against Jews, considered the primary hindrances to genuine Aryan racial development) to establish German supremacy in Europe.

In September 1939, Hitler invaded Poland and unleashed his attack not only upon a military enemy but innocent people principally, who were Jews. He began by progressively reducing the rights and freedom of the Jewish population and then finally herded them into ghettos. In the summer of 1941, Hitler invaded the Soviet Union and began the systemic extermination of Jews through the use of *Einsatzgruppen* or mobile killing units (Bauer, 2001, p. 210), which in the end proved to be ineffective and costly. For this reason, Hitler ordered the development of a plan to answer the Jewish question or what is known as the Final Solution. *Aktion Reinhard* was the code name for the program to eliminate European Jews (Bauer, 2001, pp. 226-230).

Hitler's Aktion plan called for the development of an efficient method to execute large numbers of Jews. The Chelmno extermination camp, near Łodz, Poland, was the first concentration camp that was used to perfect the technique for the mass murder and disposal of Jews. What developed out of this experimentation was the construction of three extermination camps in Nazi-occupied Poland: Treblinka, Sobibor, and Belzec. These "death camps" were built not to profit from slave labor like German concentration camps but were designed to liquidate the lives of the Jewish people.

The ultimate purpose of these death camps was the mass extermination of Jews upon arrival. Between 1942 and 1943, nearly one and a half million Jews perished in these three death camps. The Nazis advanced their methods from the lessons learned at Chelmno and the Aktion camps and applied them at the Majdanek and Auschwitz concentration camps. At Auschwitz, the Third Reich's system was perfected, culminating in the systematic and effective mass murder of innocent people. Estimates place the death toll at Auschwitz between 1.1 and 1.5 million people, with the overwhelming majority of them being European Jews. In the end, Hitler's solution to the Jewish question resulted in what we know today as the Shoah and the extermination of six million European Jews, of which more than half were Jews from Poland.

### Trauma of the Shoah

World War II in Europe was a political and economic trauma for the Jews. But more so than that, it was spiritual devastation—literally destruction to which Jews refer today as the Shoah. Of the 11 million European civilians, who died during WWII, six million people only died because they were Jewish. The number of deaths is staggering when considering the fact that eighty percent of the European Jewish population perished

or was exterminated at the hands of the Nazis within the six-year period of the war (Krysińska & Lester, 2006, p. 141).

It is difficult to understand the scale and depth of the collective trauma suffered by the Jews during the Shoah. Researchers, such as Krysińska and Lester (2006), have examined “empirical research and clinical observations concerning the long-term consequences” arising from the trauma of the Shoah suffered by European Jews (p. 142). These researchers note the gross injustice committed by Nazi Germany against an innocent group of people—the Jews. Furthermore, European Jews had suffered persecution at the hand of their neighbor for centuries; however, during the era of WWII and the Shoah, the Jewish people endured at the hands of the Nazis “the most severe and unprecedented oppression and terror” in their history (p. 142).

Krysińska and Lester (2006) also report that secondary trauma has been seen among “professionals working with trauma survivors” and concluded that the transmission of the trauma “does not necessarily require direct contact with survivors” but may arise from merely “working with documents, movies, photographs and other objects connected with trauma” resulting in traumatization vicariously (p. 147). They examined research concerning the long-term effects of the “KZ/survivor syndrome” (Konzentrationslager or concentration camp syndrome) which expressed itself somatically in physical maladies (headaches, chest pains, digestive problems), psychologically in mental disorders, cogitatively in mental impairment, and socially in the breakdown of social and interpersonal functions, such as “withdrawal and alienation” (p. 143).

## Overcoming Jewish-Christian Conflict

The second section of the review of the academic literature will address the Christian response to the Shoah and the efforts that Jews and Christians have made to resolve differences and to bridge the gap that separates them.

### Christian Dissidents in Nazi Germany

The Nazi ideologies and subsequent policies of Germany according to Bauer (2001) led to an anti-Christian movement, which denied “the brotherhood of man” and denied “the Fatherhood of God;” Nazism “promoted a *volk* community that would be free of the influences of churches (p. 142). Hitler, as the Führer, was the “secular authority” and the “messenger of God” and, as such, was “the interpreter of the scriptures” (p. 142). A mainstream view of German Protestantism was “*Cuius regio, eius religio* (whoever rules determines the religion),” which advocated submission to “secular Christian authority,” unless it was contradictory to “scriptural commandments” (p. 142). The implications of such a frame of reference led to the establishment effectively of a Reich Church or the “so-called German Christian Church,” as the representative of the Protestant Church to the German Nazi government, which embraced Hitler’s “national revival” and enabled it to engage in “the fight against pacifism, socialism, Freemasonry and the Jews” (p. 142).

According to Bauer, opponents to the Reich Church, or the German Christian Church were persecuted, and “by February 1934, some seventy pastors had been sent to concentration camps” (p. 142). The Christian dissidents to the Reich were led by Martin Niemöller. Niemöller was a “German nationalist, commander of a submarine in World War I, and a national hero,” and initially he accepted the new status quo of Nazi Germany

but later “he refused to recognize the right of secular authorities to determine matters of conscience for individuals and denied the state’s claims of supremacy over Christians” (pp. 142-143). In 1934, a group of traditional pastors established the Confessing Church (Bekennende Kirche, BK) and in a statement mainly written authored by Karl Barth, the Protestant theologian, the BK committed itself to the Gospel of Jesus Christ as “the inviolable foundation of the German Evangelical Church” (p. 143). The Barmen declaration rejected the Nazi ideology of the Führer as a special ruler, and it also dismissed the idea that the State is able to order and control human life.

Bauer lastly points to several critical Christian dissidents, who courageously opposed the Reich. Bishop Theophil Wurm stood against “mercy killing (euthanasia)” and spoke out against Jewish persecution; Ludwig Steil “defended the Jews and died in a Nazi camp” (p. 143). Pastor Heinrich Grüber endured life in a concentration camp for assisting “both converted and non-converted Jews,” and following the war, he testified at the trial of Adolf Eichmann in 1961 (p. 143). Bauer reasons that “of the thousands of pastors and church leaders who were imprisoned about 500 died,” and of this number was Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who “was murdered in a Nazi prison as an anti-Nazi resistor” (p. 144). Although Bonhoeffer like many of his contemporary pastors espoused the separation of Jews from German society along with other racial ideas regarding the Jews as “legitimate,” he reasoned that the central Nazi viewpoint regarding the Jewish question was “paganism,” and consequently concluded that “only he who cries out for the Jews may sing the Gregorian chant” (p. 144).

## Contemporary Christian Response to the Shoah

In terms of dealing with the destruction of the Shoah today, how should Christians respond? The genocide—the mass murder of Jews symbolized by Auschwitz did not arise overnight. It emerged from the longstanding conflict between Jews and Christians regarding the person of Jesus Christ—as Bauer (2001) indicates, anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism. During Hitler’s rise to power, these viewpoints became the basis used to establish Nazi ideology, which ultimately led to the destruction of the Shoah. In a contemporary parallel to the Shoah, Miroslav Volf (2000) asks: How could Christians in Rwanda “participate in or avert their eyes from . . . genocide” (p. 158)? He additionally probes a similar question: “Why are Christians, the presumed agents of peace, at best impotent in the face of their people’s conflicts and at worst perpetrators of the most heinous crimes” (p. 159)?

Waller (2007) additionally examines the institutional church, and how it, and its agents shape a cultural climate “in which genocidal violence may occur;” he also addresses issues concerning how this ethos “responds to such a culture both during and after the genocidal violence” (p. 139). Waller uses case studies to examine these questions concerning genocide occurring in Christian cultures, among which he addresses the Shoah. He notes that the Shoah or destruction occurred in Europe, where at the time, nearly 90% of Europeans considered themselves to be Christians, and more so in Germany where “95% of Germans were baptized, taxpaying members of an established Christian church” (p. 140).

The Shoah was a tragic event that profoundly affected the Jewish community and significantly strained Jewish and Christian relations. It is difficult to understand

completely why the Shoah occurred, but it did. The question remains, how should Christians respond?

In 1965, the Roman Catholic Church in its *Nostra Aetate* declaration “declared that ‘the Jews’ of Jesus’s time could not be held responsible for the crucifixion” (Bauer, 2001, p. 20). Furthermore, Cherry and Orla-Bukowska (2007) state that *Nostra Aetate* advocated for “fraternal dialogues” and condemned “hatred, persecutions, displays of antisemitism, directed against Jews at any time and by anyone” (loc. 167). Such condemnation was not taken lightly among the leaders of the Roman Catholic Church, and steps were taken to address anti-Semitism among its constituency.

In 1978, for example, Pope John Paul II visited Poland for the first time as the Polish pope. According to Krajewski (2007), the message of the pope “to the Poles was consistent and clear” (p. 152). He advised them to “respect the Jews and their religion” (p. 152). The Chief Rabbi of Poland, Michael Schudrich (2007) believes that Pope John Paul II, “did more than any other person in two thousand years to fight antisemitism” (p. 139). His actions and his words “had an enormous impact on Poles;” his teaching “really did change the attitude of many (not all) Poles toward the Jews and Judaism” (p. 139). He taught Poles that Jews were their “older brothers in faith,” and this lesson “is one that molded the approach of many Poles toward Jews” (p. 139).

In light of the John Paul II’s influence and *Nostra Aetate*, the Polish Episcopate Council for Religious Dialogue issued a letter in 2000, which “proclaimed the need for an intricate ‘effort at a purification of memory’” and it also addressed “attitudes toward Jews” (Krajewski, 2007, p. 149). Furthermore, Krajewski outlines the major points of the letter.



First, it reiterates that the people of Israel have been chosen with an “irrevocable calling.” Then it quotes a statement by Cardinal Józef Glemp, who asked forgiveness for “the attitudes of those who disregard people of other religions or tolerate antisemitism.” Finally, “sins from the time of the Shoah” are recalled, namely “indifference and enmity against Jews.” The very mention of enmity is another step forward” (p. 149).

Nevertheless, despite these positive steps, the false myth, anti-Semitism, and anti-Judaism linger among many Christians today.

The *Erschütterung* of the Shoah led Jews to reexamine their theological convictions, while Christians fundamentally continued as if nothing, no break, or rupture occurred. Concerning contemporary developments in Jewish-Christian dialogue, Karpen (2002) postulates:

In a sense, the slow pace of the Jewish-Christian dialogue has been due to the reluctance and inability of most Christians to recognize and understand the devastating extent of the rupture the Shoah created in the Christian faith. Christianity following the Shoah, even in Germany, attempted to pick up and continue as though no rupture had occurred and no transformation was required.

Moreover, Karpen adroitly argues, “the hesitancy of the churches to deal seriously” with the Shoah and the historical break that it produced “still continues to divide Jews and Christians” (p. 112). Christians cannot ignore the Shoah; they must remember and reconsider what should be their response. For Karpen, developing an “ethic of remembering” is a crucial response in alleviating “Christian historical amnesia,” and consequently allows “authentic reconciliation to begin” (p. 206).

### How Might Christians Respond to the Shoah?

Remembering is an action that is linked to values. It is not enough to remember; we must act upon the memory of what we remember. The work of remembering is not cost-free, especially when we talk about the trauma and injustice of the Jewish people, who suffered senselessly in the Shoah. When we recall the Shoah, what should we do? In

light of dealing with past traumas, Judith Lewis Herman (2015) states, “Remembering and telling the truth about terrible events are prerequisites both for the restoration of the social order and for the healing of individual victims” (p. 1). The work of remembering it seems produces two outcomes. Firstly, it allows for “the restoration of the social order,” and secondly, it enables individual victims to experience healing. Theoretically speaking, when we remember, restoration and healing should be experienced socially and individually. But what does that mean? What does the work of remembering look like? How is the work of remembering done?

Karpen (2002) provides a few clues, which lead to three crucial theoretical insights as to how Christians *might* respond to the Shoah. Firstly, he argues for the need for “an ethic of remembering,” and secondly, he maintains that there needs to be “a way to place memory [of the Shoah] closer to the heart of Christianity” (p. 205). Thirdly, he provides a glimpse as to how remembering brings the memory of the Shoah “closer to the heart of Christianity” by working “together on the task of *tikkun olam*, the repair of the world” (p. 206).

What might be done to bring the Shoah closer to the hearts of Christians? Other than observing the commemoration of *Yom HaShoah* (Holocaust Remembrance Day) and *Kristallnacht* (Night of the Broken Glass), Karpen does not elaborate a means by which the memory of the Shoah could be brought “closer to the heart of Christianity.”

Where does remembering lead? Herman indicates that it leads to restoration and healing. On the other hand, Karpen provides three theoretical insights as to how the memory of the Shoah might be brought closer to Christian’s hearts and lead them toward restoration, healing, and reconciliation. Karpen’s three postulates offer a seedbed for me

to root my hypothesis, as I explore a means to bridge the chasm and close the gap between Jews and Christians. To do so, I may reorder Karpen's concepts and express them in this way: remembering, repairing the world and bringing the memory closer to Christians by working together with Jews. In this manner, I may link Karpen's three concepts to the work of TMF, which is guided by three analogous principles: remembering, restoring, and reconciling.

Briefly, I will consider Karpen's postulates and link them to the work of TMF. First, he views *remembering* as meaning "to put back together" (p. 9)—it is a form of reconstructing the past in the present. As such, remembering, for TMF, is neither passive nor reactive, but it is a pro-active response to the evil and injustice of the Shoah. In other words, remembering requires us, as Christians working within the framework of TMF to confront the past of the Shoah by acting in the present by restoring Jewish cemeteries in Poland. Within this framework, remembering leads to action and should give birth to restoration and healing.

Second, Karpen links the Jewish concept of *Tikkun Olam* "with the Christian teachings on reconciliation (restoration of harmony)" (p. 123). In terms of the work of TMF, restoration is a process more closely tied to the Jewish understanding of *Tikkun Olam* as a means of repairing, mending or *restoring* something broken in the world. Wilkens and Sanford (2009) describe restoration as a process in which something that is damaged becomes "restored to a new condition" (p. 196). Sucharov (2011) views restorative work as "a process that extends beyond the bounds of the dyadic field to include the surrounding world context" (p. 175). Subsequently, Dorff (2007) states that

*Tikkun Olam* is “literally fixing the world by making it a better place . . . through ‘social action’” (loc. 126).

I may link these notions of *Tikkun Olam* to the work of TMF as it seeks to restore neglected and forgotten cemeteries, as well as mending broken relationships.

Collectively, these ideas hold in view the physical, social, psychological, and spiritual healing and restoration of this rupture in the relationship between Jews and Christians.

Third, Karpen defines reconciliation as meaning “not only ‘to restore to harmony’ but also, in the mathematical sense, ‘to account for’” (p. 9). Nonetheless, I may consider that the essential meaning of reconciliation as an ongoing process of *reconciling*. In the short term, what this means for TMF is that restoration is a process of reconnecting and bringing together disjointed elements—Jews and Christians, so that they may mutually care for and restore Jewish cemeteries in Poland. Reconciliation, regarding how Karpen defines it, is something that may emerge in the future. Finally, remembering, restoring, and reconciling within the framework of TMF cannot facilitate the healing of wounds and closing the rift between Jews and Christians *without* dialogue.

#### Institutional Initiatives Concerning Jewish-Christian Dialogue

Jewish-Christian relations have been strained since the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. The events of the Shoah have only deepened and extended the chasm that exists between Jew and Christian. Some groups of Jews and Christians, such as the International Council of Christians and Jews (2009), have entered dialogue on a formal and primarily institutional level, as represented by the International Council of Christians and Jews (ICCJ). Other groups have begun an interfaith dialogue more so locally via inter-congregational educational programs (e.g., Karpen, 2002; Krajewski, 2005; O'Keefe,

2010), while some individual Jews and Christians are pursuing dialogue (e.g., Karpen, 2002). Mostly, among many Jews, the common perception is that Christians are somehow culpable for the injustice committed against them by Nazi Germany and as such, ostensibly have no desire to enter into dialogue with Christians.

The profound terrors of the Shoah justifiably *some* led Jews and Christians to realize their need for dialogue. Consequently in 1947, a group of them met formally in Seelisberg, Switzerland so that they might mutually declare their collective anguish about the Shoah, their desire to confront anti-Semitism, and “their desire to foster stronger relationships between Jews and Christians” (International Council of Christians and Jews, 2009, p. 2). Their encounter produced the “Ten Points of Seelisberg,” calling for “Christian churches to reflect on and renew their understandings of Judaism and their relationship with Jews” (p. 2). Another outcome of this meeting was the establishment of the International Council of Christians and Jews (ICCCJ), which continues “to pursue the dialogue [among Jews and Christians] in spite of difficulties” (p. 2). The ICCJ does not view Jewish-Christian relations as problematic requiring some resolution; instead, they view Jewish-Christian relations as a “continuing process of learning and refinement” (p. 2).

Concerning the nature of dialogue among Jews and Christians in Poland, it is significant to note the dissimilarity between Christian-Jewish dialogue within Poland and the universal Christian-Jewish dialogue outside Poland. Krajewski (2005) comments that, within the context of Poland, “people often use the term ‘Polish-Jewish’ dialogue,” which from an international point of view “is understandable” (p. 204). The difficulty with employing this dichotomous term for Polish-Jewish dialogue is that Poles, for the most

part, are Christians; however, on the other hand, its application to Jews “would mean that Jews are not Poles” (p. 204). Such an understanding was prevalent before the war; nonetheless, Jews were Polish citizens, albeit a minority.

Today whether religious or not, Jews are living in Poland, as Polish citizens, while Jews of Polish origins are living abroad. Therefore, Krajewski regards dialogue in Poland among Polish Christians and Jews as “Polish-Polish,” meaning that it comprises “a Polish section of the universal Christian-Jewish dialogue” (p. 205). Similarly, Krajewski (2007) posits that “Roman Catholic-Jewish relations in contemporary Poland are virtually equivalent to Christian-Jewish relations” (p. 141).

Moreover, Krajewski (2007) directs attention to the institutional actions of the Roman Catholic Church in Poland, which, in 1986, established the Episcopate’s Commission for Dialogue with Judaism. This commission issued a pastoral letter in November 1990 that “expressed the historic new official teachings on Judaism stemming from the *Nostra Aetate* declaration,” and explicitly pointed out “the fact that while the Shoah was committed by Germans, it happened principally on Polish soil” (p. 149). The issuance of this pastoral letter elicited some criticism; notwithstanding, it overcame “much of the defensiveness or denial of any Polish involvement in that tragedy so common in Poland” (p. 149).

Since the end of WWII, Jewish-Christian dialogue “has become commonplace” (Karpen, 2002, p. 4). Even though Jewish-Christian dialogue has become more common due to advances in Jewish-Christian relations, it is still challenging. Michael Kress (2012) views Jewish-Christian interaction as primarily improving because Christians have completely re-evaluated their “attitude toward Jews and Judaism” (para. 1). The Christian

re-evaluation of Judaism indeed has revolutionized the relationship between Jews and Christians. Kress further emphasizes that even though differences remain between them, contemporary Jews may reasonably expect for the first time in history “that these differences will be addressed through interfaith dialogue rather than the violence of the past” (para. 2). Moreover, Kress points out that during the Shoah, Christians played the role of “rescuers—people whose faith led them to risk their lives by hiding or otherwise saving Jews” (para. 4). The brave acts of these Christians do undeniably provide a significant connection between Jews and Christians; “however, the role of Christians and Christianity in perpetuating the Shoah remains a point of contention between the two religions” (Kress, 2012, para. 4).

Theresa O'Keefe (2010) of Boston College does not explicitly define what she means by interfaith dialogue but infers its meaning primarily as a discussion among Jews and Christians. She rightly contends that formal interreligious dialogue at the institutional level has done much “to improve relations among Christians and Jews over the past seventy years” (p. 2). Nevertheless, O’Keefe views that advances “have not been made” in interfaith dialogue at the level of local Jewish and Christian inter-congregational interaction (p. 2). Moreover, she argues that “building relationships” between Jews and Christians individually “should be central to an educational agenda for members of local congregations” (p. 2). Lastly, she believes that

Interfaith relationships serve as a motivator of care and understanding for congregants, just as they do for leaders in dialogue. Direct engagement between congregants results in greater self-awareness and commitment to improve relations between the two religious communities (p. 2).

Generally, I would agree with O’Keefe that building individual relationships among Jew and Christian is a crucial consideration and highly needful; however, I

contend that pursuing an educational approach within an institutional framework, even if it involves individual interaction, would still be too formal and not foster genuine face-to-face interaction. I am not interested in pursuing a structured interfaith dialogue at any level. Interreligious dialogue is noteworthy and an essential element of the healing process as it relates to Jewish-Christian relations.

Nonetheless, I desire to move beyond formal interfaith dialogue to a more organic interpersonal dialogue, which is more in line with the understanding that Isaac advances and will be explored later in this summary of the literature in the section titled: Dialogue. In my view, dialogue that is based on a shared inquiry could lead to new possibilities and outcomes in Jewish-Christian relations. What would it look like if individual Jews and Christians collectively challenged the existing status quo of Jewish and Christian relations? I think that it will take this type of dialogue to open possibly new pathways that would embrace forgiveness and reconciliation.

### **Foundations of Morality**

The third section of the literature review will consider a common moral framework, shared Jewish and Christian perspectives and moral values of justice and mercy, academic parallels, and the horizontal and vertical aspects of reconciliation. I searched the literature for academic and theoretical counterparts to these Jewish and Christian moral and ethical frameworks.

#### **Common Moral Framework**

Previously, I have indicated that my primary worldview assumption is that there is “an ultimate standard of goodness in the universe,” and G-d is that standard (Anderson, 2014, p. 45). Sire (2009) indicates that G-d’s “goodness is expressed in two ways,



through holiness and through love” (Sire, 2009, p. 30). These two attributes may be understood as justice and mercy or loving-kindness. G-d’s holiness “emphasizes his righteousness,” and secondly, his love is directed toward “self-sacrifice and the full extension of his favor to his people” (Sire, 2009, p. 30). Furthermore, as Sire (2009) points out from these two aspects of G-d’s character, his person, we can conclude that “there is an absolute and personal standard of righteousness . . . and second, that there is hope for humanity” (p. 31).

Nevertheless, many individuals reject such an idealistic view (e.g., Stenger, 2006) rather than embracing its practice (e.g., Purpel, 2008). Undoubtedly, men and women often live in communities at odds with each other, at times divided deeply by embedded value and cultural differences, practices, and beliefs. Does a common moral framework exist within which people may live their lives, understand each other interrelate and resolve disputes, so that they might live life with each other in peace? Wolf (2010b) points to the work of University of California anthropologist, Elvin Hatch, who delineated the concept of the “ubiquity of moral evaluation of behaviour (sic)” that exists across borders in global cultures (cited in, Wolf, 2010b, p. 9). Wolf views Hatch’s concept as “the core moral sense of humane human behavior” (p. 9).

Researchers and authors (e.g., Melé & Sánchez-Runde, 2013; Purpel, 2008; Stenger, 2006; Wolf, 2010a) indicate that there is a standard, moral framework for humanity from which to live with our neighbors in the communities in which we live.

For example, Thom Wolf (2010b) discusses the “J-shaped spiritual capital of the west,” which grows out of the 2008 work of Theodore Malloch of Yale University (p. 8). Wolf states that Malloch “argues that historically, the spiritual capital of Protestant

business persons focuses on the three virtues of faith, hope, and charity” (p. 8).

According to Wolf, Malloch subsequently maintains that a “Jesus-shaped *worshipview* [sic] . . . yields a worldview triad of leadership discipline (faith), social compassion (charity), and persevering justice (hope)” (p. 8).

Consequently, I may connect Malloch’s “three virtues of faith, hope, and charity” to a moral template or pattern consisting of justice, mercy, and humility. Although some would question the source of these values, I argue that these three moral values, as seen in Micah 6:8, are transcendent and universal and in themselves a moral standard. Therefore, I contend that the moral construction for life is to act justly/*justice*, to love mercy/*charity*, and to walk humbly with God/*faithfulness*.

Hyman (2005) states that the rabbis, who wrote the Talmud, determined that Micah 6:8 “by virtue of its three principles of doing justice, loving mercy, and walking humbly with God,” captured the essence of the 613 commandments in the *Halakhah* (p. 157). According to Hyman (2005) the core of Micah 6:8 is based on a tripartite pattern of a simple string of three verbs emphasizing “*doing, loving, and walking*—connected to three basic moral values – *justice, mercy, and humility*,” which “make it comprehensible and easy to remember” (p. 164). Hyman concludes:

The three verbs indicate deliberate human actions and are different from verbs that represent involuntary actions such as breathing, crying, and sneezing. The series of three pairs of ‘a verb tied to a moral value’ creates an appealing poetic rhythm. Together, they constitute a series that is a moral guideline for behavior among humans; a goal worth striving for (p. 164).

#### Jewish-Christian Foundation: Justice and Mercy

In this section, I will only consider two of the values reviewed in Micah 6:8; they are justice and mercy. We learn from Telushkin (2006) that the prophet Micah teaches us that “God’s primary demand of human beings is to act righteously [or justly]” (p. 14).

Telushkin expounds and says that G-d does not require from us sacrifices or religious rituals; “rather, God’s most significant demands are justice, compassion, and humility” (p. 14).

The Torah teaches that justice is focused upon our actions toward others. According to Telushkin (2001), the Hebrew word *tzedakah* is translated as justice or righteousness, and “it is usually translated, somewhat inaccurately as charity” (p. 573). He elaborates further by stating that acting justly “is perhaps the most important obligation Judaism imposes on the Jew” (p. 573). The Torah admonishes us in Deuteronomy 16:20 to pursue justice: “Justice (*tzedakah*), justice you shall pursue.” Later we learn from the Talmud: “*Tzedakah* is equal to all the other commandments combined (Bava Bathra 9b)” (cited in, Telushkin, 2001, p. 573). The giving of *tzedakah* is viewed in Judaism as acting justly. By extension, justice means that we are to be fair in how we deal with other people. We are not to lie, cheat, or steal.

If we seek justice, we help others, the oppressed, and care for orphans and widows. These actions express mercy. In the Micah 6:8, we see that mercy is derived from the Hebrew word, *chesed*, which means treating others with kindness, literally loving-kindness. This type of kindness shows concern or care for others; furthermore, we understand this sort of kindness as compassion. The Jewish Talmud considers compassion to be “the hallmark of an ethical person,” and it “is *the* defining characteristic of being a Jew” (Telushkin, 2006, p. 20). In the writings of the Prophet Isaiah 1:16b-17, we hear the admonition to Israel: “Stop doing wrong, learn to do right! Seek justice, encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow.” The Bible characterizes G-d as just and righteous and connects these attributes

to his mercy. He is just, righteous, and acts mercifully on behalf of humanity. We also observe in Hosea 6:6 that God is not pleased by sacrifices, but kindness: “For I desire mercy (kindness), not sacrifice, and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings.”

Du Preez (1985) discusses in his article G-d’s concern for those treated unjustly. By doing what is right toward one’s neighbor, the love, or the loving-kindness of G-d is revealed. Furthermore, according to D. J. Bosch (1984), justice is central to the gospel of Matthew (p. 27), which illustrates the fact that the G-d of love is the G-d of justice or righteousness. Bosch argues that we cannot divorce “spiritual righteousness . . . from earthly justice” (p. 28). Du Preez connects these two dimensions of G-d to each other, forming a concept he describes as “*justice-love*” and links it to the kingdom of G-d. He believes that this construct is valid in both the Old and New Testaments.

The Bible reveals G-d, as the G-d of love, who is also the G-d of righteousness and justice, and as Waldron Scott (1980) indicates, this G-d, “is concerned about social justice, not mere private morality” (p. 49). Glasser and McGavran (1983) echo this point of view and conclude that G-d, “is strongly moved by the cries of the oppressed, particularly when his people collectively make no effort to relieve their anguish” (p. 35). The relevance of these two statements is that the people of G-d are to be not just morally upright, but they are to be compassionate and to show concern for their neighbors—those around them oppressed by injustice.

Jesus summarized the Torah (the Law) into two basic statements: love of G-d and love of neighbor and declared that the entirety of the Law and the Prophets rest on these two commandments (Matt. 22:40). Jesus does not merely have in view for those, who follow him only to obey a series of “moral or ceremonial rules;” obviously he is being

“quite concrete” and stating that loving G-d is “revealed in doing what is right towards one’s neighbour [sic]” (Du Preez, 1985, p. 45).

Doing what is right because of love for neighbor is what DuPreez equates with his concept of justice-love. The justice that Jesus has in view is clarified further in the so-called “Sermon on the Mount” (found in Matthew 5:21-47). In his teaching, Jesus illuminates the concept of G-d’s justice “in terms of a number of pithy contrasts in which the keyword is *love* that wishes to do right to one’s neighbour [sic],” which by so doing demonstrates “love towards the hostile fellow-man, through which the pupil of the kingdom of God would be ‘perfect’ as his heavenly Father is perfect” (Du Preez, 1985, p. 45). In other words, this type of justice and love would reveal the character of G-d in a person by their actions.

#### Humane Orientation

House, Javidan, Hanges, and Dorfman (2002) outline the parameters of the GLOBE (Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior Effectiveness) Study, which is a multi-country/culture case study of nine dimensions of leadership and culture in 62 nations. These dimensions are performance orientation, future orientation, assertiveness, power distance, humane orientation, institutional collectivism, in-group collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, and gender egalitarianism.

The GLOBE Study acknowledges the role of religion in shaping our understanding of what humane behavior is. In Judaism, Islam and Christianity, G-d is seen as the “ultimate” source of “goodness” and requires “humane-orientated behaviors and doing good to others,” while in Eastern Religions such as Buddhism and Taoism, “there is no God that gives orders in the direction of goodness;” instead, individuals must

“harmonize” themselves with the “cosmic rhythm” and do what is “good” (Kabaskal & Bodur, 2004, p. 565).

Humane orientation may be defined as “the degree to which individuals in organizations or societies encourage and reward individuals for being fair, altruistic, friendly, generous, caring, and kind to others” (Javidan & Dastmalchian, 2009). Kabaskal and Bodur (2004) explain further that “this dimension is manifested in the way people treat one another and in the social programs institutionalized within each society” (p. 569). Simply stated, humane orientation is concerned with the welfare of humanity.

Descriptions of humane behavior are not new but have existed since antiquity and “ideas and values” related to this dimension may be found among “classic Greek philosophers” and “in the teachings of many of the major religions of the world” (Kabaskal & Bodur, 2004, p. 565). The principal idea embedded in the classical Greek understanding concerning this human attribute is reciprocal, as well as mutual love found in friendship. Humans are interrelated and connected to each other; therefore, love or concern for others is a fundamental expression of humanity.

Humane orientation is expressed differently across cultures, along a continuum from high to low and humane orientation in societies and institutions. Briefly, the concept of humane orientation is not unique; it is related to what Hofstede and Bond (1988) called “Kind Heartedness.” It is also related to the work of Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck (1961) regarding “Human Nature Is Good vs. Human Nature Is Bad.” We also see a connection with the work of Putnam, Leonardi, and Nanetti (1993) regarding their treatment of “the Civic Society” and from McClelland (1985) and his concepts concerning “the affiliative motive.” Furthermore, Price (1989), Dover (1980), and Ferrari (1987) looked at how

classical Greek philosophers of Plato, Aristotle, and Socrates viewed interpersonal relationships. Kabaskal and Bodur (2004) point to Triandis' 1995 theory on culture and posit that "values of altruism, benevolence, kindness, love, and generosity" are important factors to consider with regards to social behaviors of people "in societies characterized by a strong humane orientation" (p. 565).

### The Horizontal and Vertical Aspects of Reconciliation

Miroslav Volf (2000) points to the 1994 work of Ralph Premdas, a sociologist, who argues that religious leadership in churches should consider "religious and ethnic conflict more seriously" and "devise instruments of popular education that raise people's awareness of the issues at stake and *communicate the biblical message of reconciliation*" (cited in, Volf, 2000, p. 160). Volf concludes that Premdas is correct and agrees with him that it is essential for Christian leadership to study "the nature of conflicts and the possibilities for their resolution," so that people may be educated and be able to "engage in peacemaking" (p. 160). However, Volf views that Premdas is "too charitable toward the theology of the churches" and contends that churches do not understand "reconciliation adequately" and in particular, downplay "its social dimensions" (p. 160).

Consequently, Volf (2000) considers reconciliation to have more than a theological meaning, which most Christian theologians understand as the "reconciliation of the individual and God" (p. 162). Nevertheless, he maintains that justice should be understood "as a dimension of the pursuit of reconciliation, whose ultimate goal is a community of love" (p. 163). Furthermore, Volf reasons correctly that reconciliation has a vertical dimension (between G-d and humanity) and a horizontal dimension (among

men and women) and concludes that without this “horizontal dimension reconciliation would simply not exist” (p. 166).

### **Transformation of Assumptions**

How do the assumptions of people transform? In what ways may reconciliation be achieved? How do people actually reconcile? The final section of the review of the literature review considers theories and models regarding dialogue and race relations, liminal space, and transformational learning. TMF is a third space of a transformative space in which assumptions can be questioned, and new assumptions or new horizons emerge—this is dialogue, according to Isaacs (1999). In this section, I will also examine some theories/models that relate to transformative learning, as well as learning models that lead to the transformation of assumptions.

#### **Dialogue**

According to Isaacs (1999), dialogue is not a discussion and is not centered on “making a decision” by ruling out options, which leads to “closure and completion” (p. 45). The root connotation of decision means to “murder the alternative” (p. 45).

Dialogue, on the other hand, does not rule out options. Instead, dialogue seeks to discover new options, which provide insight, and a means by which to reorder knowledge, “particularly the taken-for-granted assumptions that people bring to the table” (p. 45).

Subsequently, dialogue in the context of this study means “a shared inquiry, a way of thinking and reflecting together” (Isaacs, 1999, p. 9). In this light, Isaacs views dialogue as occurring in terms of a relationship with someone else. He contends that dialogue is not about our “effort to make [that person] understand us;” it is about people coming “to a greater understanding about [themselves] and each other” (p. 9).



In a similar vein, Donskis (2013) asserts dialogue requires not only the capacity to hear and listen but a willingness to set aside personal presumptions and “to examine one’s own life” (para. 5). It appears that dialogue is an interchange framed by humility and not by arrogance, or pride. In dialogue, parties should not seek to “prevail over [their] opponent at whatever cost” (Donskis, 2013, para. 5). Moreover, as Donskis infers, if dialogue is approached in humility, it will “arrest our aggressive and agonistic wish to prevail and dominate at the expense of someone else’s dignity, not to mention the truth itself” (para. 5). Being understood, winning a debate, or an argument is not the outcome that dialogue should seek. As Isaacs contends, dialogue should lead people “to a greater understanding about [themselves] and each other” (Isaacs, 1999, p. 9).

If dialogue is approached in using these insights, it could lead to new possibilities and outcomes that would challenge the existing status quo of Jewish and Christian relations.

### **Martin Buber’s Theory of Dialogue**

Shady and Larson (2010) ask a series of questions: How do educators deal with the challenges that religious diversity presents in the classroom? What will it take for teachers to prepare their pupils to engage in the discourse regarding “competing religious truths? Should tolerance be our final goal, or is a deeper sense of mutual understanding possible” (p. 81)? Tippett (2007) stated, “It is possible to be a believer and a listener at the same time, to be both fervent and searching, to nurture a vital identity and to wonder at the identities of others” (loc. 157). Shady and Larson (2010) pick up on this statement and juxtapose it with the question: “How do I balance my own belief commitments with my responsibility to be genuinely open to and challenged by the other’s perspective” (p.

82)? They consider this question in their paper as a means “to explore how [they] can help [their] students (and [themselves])” understand issues related to religious diversity in the classroom in terms of “proper intellectual boundaries” (p. 82). Furthermore, they postulate in their paper that Martin Buber’s work concerning the difference in religion, “holds fruitful answers to the challenging questions of diversity in the twenty-first century” (p. 82).

Shady and Larson describe the “process of dialogue,” which allows someone to come to understand the position of another person, “while at the same time remaining rooted” in their point of view. Additionally, they point out that Buber maintained that inclusion connects both the “interpersonal boundaries with the intellectual boundaries” (Shady & Larson, 2010, p. 82), and Buber (1957) considered “the relation in education is one of pure dialogue” (p. 98). In essence, they conclude that Buber’s model advocates “a shared reality where all partners in the dialogue come to understand each other’s position, even if they do not entirely agree with it” (Shady & Larson, 2010, p. 83).

The authors go on to explain the components and philosophies of Buber’s educational theory, identifying what Buber termed, “Between.” The authors state that the notion of between, according to Buber, is an “ontological category where the ‘meeting’ occurs” (Shady & Larson, 2010, p. 84). Buber (1955) defined “Between” as “the narrow ridge between subjective and objective where I and Thou meet” (p. 204). It is at this point that inclusion occurs, and true dialogue begins. Once more, I may link the conceptual framework of liminal space with Buber’s concept of “Between” and dialogue.

Consequently, Shady and Larson (2010) dismiss the educational practices of tolerance and empathy, as being inadequate methods of dealing with religious diversity in

the classroom. As an alternative, they consider Buber's concept of inclusion, which "seeks to break down boundaries and develop deep relations with other people and with things that others have created" (p. 88). Furthermore, they argue that an exclusive approach of education advances knowledge and intellectual development, as it does not promote inclusiveness through dialogue or an exchange of ideas regarding a particular subject; "learning is both cognitive and affective, involving the whole person" (p. 90). The authors advance several examples of what educational inclusion might look like, and for example, consider Karen Armstrong (a British historian and theologian) and how her views on education are similar to Buber's:

She [Armstrong] shows that education is not merely cognitive but is also necessarily affective and even spiritual. She shows that inclusion is marked by a willingness to open oneself to new ideas and perspectives—perhaps even being changed by them—but doing so without losing sight of oneself (Shady & Larson, 2010, p. 92).

### **Courageous Conversations about Race**

Religious discrimination, as well as anti-Semitism, is a form of racism as it is an expression of prejudice against other beliefs/faiths. The paradigm espoused by the courageous conversation framework straightforwardly applies to developing a profitable dialogue between religious groups in conflict between themselves or others. From Singleton and Hays (2008) and Singleton and Curtis (2006), we encounter the four agreements of courageous conversations about racial conflict: (a) staying engaged in the dialogue about race, (b) a willingness to be uncomfortable or experience discomfort, (c) speaking your truth and being honest about feelings and opinions, and (d) expecting and accepting that closure may not be realized, as resolutions are rare (Singleton & Hays,

2008, pp. 19-21). These four principles are vital in assisting me to navigate the racial (and religious) issues that I face with the Jewish community, and for my work in Poland.

Anti-Semitism in Poland is a present reality. Although I do not deal with the same racial issues as seen in the construct of courageous conversations, I think that the principles apply to my work. Engaging anti-Semitism through “individual and collective actions that challenges” (Almanzán, 2008, p. 5 ), the existing misconceptions of Christian and Jewish relations is what I am doing through the work of TMF in caring for and restoring Jewish cemeteries in Poland.

### **Speak Truth: *Dabru Emet***

The Jewish concept of *Dabru Emet*, which means in Hebrew “speak the truth to one another” (Steinfels, 2000, para. 2), relates very well to “speaking truth” in the paradigm of the four agreements in the courageous conversations about race. It also interacts positively with the dynamic of Jewish and Christian dialogue. The concept of *Dabru Emet* has become the title of a public declaration made “by more than 150 rabbis and Jewish scholars” representing “all branches of Judaism—Reform, Conservative, Orthodox and Reconstructionist” (Steinfels, 2000, para. 12); nevertheless, it is “not an official statement by any recognized Jewish body” (Karpen, 2002, p. 179).

Through *Dabru Emet* some Jews acknowledge that “Nazism was not a Christian phenomenon” (Frymer-Kensky, Novak, Ochs, & Signer, 2000, para. 5), and in their statements, they declare that it is not possible to reconcile “the humanly irreconcilable difference between Jews and Christians . . . until God redeems the entire world as promised in Scripture” (Frymer-Kensky et al., 2000, para. 6). In light of these realities,

“Jews and Christians must work together for justice and peace” (Frymer-Kensky et al., 2000, para. 8).

### **Liminal Space**

Halina Birenbaum, a survivor of the Warsaw Ghetto and the Shoah, wrote that when she was interned at Majdanek, she volunteered along with other women to weed the grass between the electrified fences that encompassed and divided the Nazi concentration and death camp. She wrote of her experience:

[No guard, overseer or Capo] dared come between these wires, so no one urged us on, or struck or rushed us. We could sit and rest, picking at the weeds and grass. I preferred this work to any other. Here I had the peace that I longed for (Birenbaum, 1996, pp. 88-89).

Much like Halina, I find myself “between . . . wires”—in the middle space; however, I am not between such electrified fences as she was in a death camp. I am between the Jew and the Gentile-Christian.

Diana Pinto (1996) advances the notion that there is a “Jewish space inside each European nation with a significant history of Jewish life” (p. 6). Ruth Ellen Gruber (2017) reasons that Pintos’s concept delineates “the place occupied by Jews, Jewish culture, and Jewish memory” inside the framework of the European social order, “regardless of the size or activity of the local Jewish population” (loc. 7887). Gruber also considers that such Jewish space may be “‘real imaginary’ spaces: spaces, be they physical and/or within the realm of thought or idea that are, so to speak, both ‘real’ and ‘imaginary’ at the same time” (loc. 7872).

Moreover, Gruber (2009) describes what she terms “‘Virtual Jewishness,’ or a ‘Virtual Jewish World,’ peopled by ‘Virtual Jews’ who create, perform, enact or engage with Jewish culture from an outsider perspective, often in the absence of local Jewish

populations” (para. 3). She asserts that such non-Jews have “documented synagogue buildings, Jewish cemeteries, and other abandoned Jewish heritage sites and spearheaded restoration projects” (loc. 7897).

In my work with TMF, I am a “virtual Jew,” who is creating a “virtual” Jewish space in which Jew and Christian may meet and have the opportunity to work together toward the common goal of caring for and restoring a Jewish cemetery in Poland. Even though entering into this space is painful, it is a choice that both Jew and Christian must make for them to come into this space and experience each other differently.

Researchers refer to this so-called “Jewish space” as liminal space, and the concept is denoted as liminality, which was “created by Arnold Van Gennep (1909) and Victor Turner (1959)” (Auton-Cuff & Gruenhagen, 2014, p. 2). Liminality is an idea that describes being between or in the middle of two spaces, literally in-between the two—a third space; it is like the front porch of a house, which separates the home from the front yard or the street. Franks and Meteyard (2007) state that liminality is derived from the Latin word for threshold; it is “the state of being betwixt and between where the old world has been left behind, but we have not yet arrived at what is to come” (p. 215). These authors consider the suggestion of Richard Rohr (2003) that the only escape for a person entrapped in “normalcy, the way things are,” is to enter into a “sacred space,” frequently termed *liminality* (from the Latin *limen*) (p. 155). Furthermore, Rohr reasons that in liminal space, it is possible to encounter “all transformation” by moving “out of ‘business as usual’” and leave behind the “old world, . . . but we’re not sure of the new one yet” (p. 155).

In their study, Auton-Cuff and Gruenhagen (2014) used liminality as a lens to examine the identity of students and their ability to transition and graduate from a Canadian university. Students were found to be frequently “betwixt and between” three spaces: “home, work, and university” (p. 3). The authors point out (p. 3):

These spaces were not experienced as passages between one social status and another; they were all experienced simultaneously with students often engaged as “shape-shifters” donning whichever role they needed to depending on which liminal space they inhabited at which particular moment in time.

One of their findings from their study was that the conflict between these three worlds “often resulted in conflicting expectations between home, school, and work,” which in effect reinforced the student’s “doubts about their academic and motivational abilities to make it through university” (p. 3). What is significant for me to keep in view from this study is the parallel occurrence of shape-shifting that Jewish and Christian participants encounter as they engage in the work of TMF. In effect, Jews and Christians, who choose to enter the third space of TMF, enter a new space, a liminal space, in which they may experience conflict or face “conflicting expectations” between their congregations, families, and friends. How TMF navigates and copes with these conflicts is vitally important if the organization is to engage successfully Jewish, Christian, and secular participants in its educational and restorative initiatives.

#### Liminal Space as a Barrier

Andrea Ciccarelli (2012) views the idea of liminal space as a barrier or border and addresses the boundary at the level of “cultural, linguistic, philosophical and existential” elements (p. 342). Ciccarelli’s focus is on “the image of the border as a barrier and a bridge, and on the poetics of ‘the other side’” (p. 342); she considers liminal space as a position in which people face “a perennial border, with its intuitive and unconscious

representation of the *other*” (p. 347). The concept of the other, or being a foreigner in a new situation, places people out of sorts with their new space. Nic Beech (2011) considers identity construction and identity change (or change process) in terms of an individual moving from one identity to another from an individual “self-identity” to a “social-identity” (p. 285). Furthermore, Beech reasons that social contexts “frame the possibilities that people have for creating and recognizing meaning in their interactions” (p. 290). I take this to mean that people choose how they interpret their interactions with other people in the social construct and daily narrative of life.

Leslie Sharpe (2006) examines the “shifting or indeterminate kind of public space—liminal spaces, haunted space, and spaces and zones that are often ‘misread’ by locative technologies—referred to here as ‘grey zones’” (p. 1). She defines these so-called “grey zones” as spaces or places of alterity (being other or different). These spaces “could be Michel Foucault’s ‘heterotopias,’ or Marc Augé’s ‘non-places,’ or Edward Soja’s ‘thirdspace’” (p. 1). In such a space, “there is another aspect of non-place implied here: the place of border-crossing. This [space] is a place of longing—particularly the longing to cross into that space that is beyond the edge of the horizon” (p. 2).

### **Liminal Space as Transformative Space**

Moloney (2011) conducts a qualitative case study piloted among Australian women. The primary focus was the treatment of focus groups as a transformative space for spiritual encounters (liminal space, as seen in terms of a focus group). Moloney concludes that the focus group is a “sacred container” that possibly signifies “the hope that as human nature evolves, it can transform itself into its greater spiritual potential” (p. 71). She introduced me to the value of focus groups in qualitative research, and how I



might employ them as liminal space in which Jews and Christians might interact, dialoguing more freely about critical issues confronting them. Focus groups allow people to explore “the construction and negotiation of meanings” (p. 58).

### **Liminal Space in Ordinary Activities**

In their qualitative study, Mitchell and Kelly (2011) explore the possibility of creating a peaceful space (liminal) within North Belfast, Ireland, which is a city besieged by inter-religious conflict. The authors rely on “ordinary activities, such as walking, speaking, interacting, consuming, or moving through space” (Mitchell & Kelly, 2011, pp. 308-309). They derive the notion of “ordinary activities” from the work of Michel de Certeau (1984), who postulates that “everyday life invents itself by poaching in countless ways on the property of others” (p. xii). Michel de Certeau theorized, just as Mitchell and Kelly (2011) assert, that by merely walking, people are “able to transgress certain boundaries and partitions of space created by the structures in question, for instance by moving between two neighborhoods or passing through a security gate” (p. 309).

Jewish cemeteries in Poland, for the most part, lie in ruins and are uncared for due to the aftermath of the Shoah. Approaching the Jewish community for permission to care for a particular Jewish cemetery was the normal thing for me to do at the time in Poland. In retrospect and in light of de Certeau’s construct, I see how entering a Jewish cemetery allowed me to “transgress certain boundaries.”

### **Liminal Space and Cultural Go-betweens**

Erica Lehrer (2005, 2013) introduces an thought-provoking concept regarding Catholic Poles (and others by extension), who preserve Jewish memory, culture or

“space” as “stewards” (Lehrer, 2013, p. 125) or what she also terms “cultural go-betweens or caretakers” (Lehrer, 2005, p. 136). Although these cultural stewards may be seen as interlopers or imitators by some Jews, they provide “custodial care” of Jewish culture and “hold open a place in memory” (Lehrer, 2013, p. 127).

Lehrer further develops her concept of the cultural stewards and explains it to her fellow Jews using a Yiddish term of *Shabbos goy* (*goyim* pl.). This term is applied to a “non-Jew (goy), who is paid a small fee to care of practical tasks that Jews are ritually prohibited from doing on the Sabbath” (p. 127). When this term is used to describe what these non-Jewish cultural stewards are doing, she concludes that *Shabbos goyim* “captures a unique kind of caretaking undertaken with respect to Jewish commitments and traditions” (p. 127). She links the concept of *Shabbos goy* to the work of Virginia Domínguez (2000) and her idea of “a politics of love” in which cultural “rescue projects” are viewed as “worthwhile projects . . . based on . . . genuine love, respect, and affection” and not upon some type of category-defining “identity” (p. 365).

I may associate this concept of *Shabbos goy* to what we are collectively doing through TMF by caring for Jewish cemeteries in Poland. As non-Jews acting out of “love” and “respect,” we are cultural stewards, or “caretakers,” who honor and preserve the memory of Jewish heritage in Poland.

Although Auton-Cuff and Gruenhagen (2014) focus their attention on educational issues, the authors’ study offers insight into the concept of liminality and its value to the work of TMF. One of their conclusions is: “When we live and work within a liminal space, change is very possible” (p. 6). I resonate with their hypothesis because I see the possibility of changing perceptions and the possibility of opening a more in-depth

dialogue between the Jewish and Christian communities. My understanding of what I am doing in my work is that I have constructed a liminal space through the work of the non-profit foundation that I lead in which Jew and Christian may interact.

### Transformational Learning

The Matzevah Foundation is a transformative and an educational space in which dialogue may occur, assumptions, and perspectives may be examined, and forgiveness may emerge. The impetus of my work with TMF is to bridge the gap in the broken relationship between Jew and Christian through dialogue. How can we do more to change the existing assumptions that exist in the Christian and Jewish communities regarding the “other?” I found little research concerning institutional or religious educational programs that could lead to the transformation of assumptions of historically held views of Christians toward Jews.

More so, very little study has been conducted at the relational level, which has offered a clear rationale as to how to speak to the issue of lack of dialogue between Jews and Christians. The need for changing assumptions about the other is indicated in the literature through moral education; however, the mode or method for learning how to transform these historically held assumptions is not delineated. Nonetheless, academic research does consider forgiveness, perspective transformation, and experiential learning as vehicles of transformation.

### **Moral Education**

In their article, the International Council of Christians and Jews (2009) contends that the events of the Shoah forces “upon people of all faiths a responsibility to combat religious bigotry and violence” (p. 15). They view that although “classical Christian

antisemitism (sic)” was not the only reason for the occurrence of the Shoah, it played a role in “its implementation and weakened Christian opposition” (p. 15). Critically, the events of the Shoah highlight the need for and “the importance of building solidarity across racial, ethnic, and religious lines in times of relative social peace” (p. 16). If these bonds of racial and religious solidarity are absent when crises emerge, the authors of the ICCJ article surmise that “it will prove difficult or impossible to build them on short term notice under duress” (p. 16).

The authors conclude that from studies of those, who rescued Jews during the Shoah, “moral education must be implanted in people at an early age” (p. 16). More so, people need to be instructed in morality principally in the context of a family, so that “concern for the other must become a deeply ingrained, natural response” (p. 16). Ultimately, what their findings indicate is that there is a greater need for relational and more experiential-based education than institutionally based instruction.

### **Forgiveness and Breaking the Cycle of Evil**

In their article regarding intervention studies on forgiveness, Baskin and Enright (2004) define forgiveness “as the willful giving up of resentment in the face of another’s (or others’) considerable injustice and responding with beneficence to the offender even though that offender has no right to the forgiver’s moral goodness” (p. 80). *Beneficence* is a form of charity, an expression of goodness or kindness. Moreover, they conclude that forgiveness is a conscious act “freely chosen by the forgiver,” and it is not to be confused with “condoning and excusing, reconciling and forgetting” (p. 80). Elaborating further, they contend that reconciliation encompasses the restoration of a relationship between

two people “in mutual trust” (p. 80). Subsequently, reconciliation cannot transpire without trust being re-established between the two parties. Also, forgiveness may occur apart from reconciliation. Nonetheless, it is difficult for people to forget “traumatic events, but on forgiving, a person may remember in new ways—not continuing to harbor the deeply held anger” (p. 80).

Waldron and Kelley (2008) remarkably define forgiveness as a

relational process whereby harmful conduct is acknowledged by one or both partners; the harmed partner extends undeserved mercy to the perceived transgressor; one or both partners experience a transformation from negative to positive psychological states, and the meaning of the relationship is renegotiated, with the possibility of reconciliation (p. 5).

What I find interesting in Waldron and Kelly’s definition is its inclusion of “underserved mercy,” which is an extension of loving-kindness to the offender, to the one who transgressed. Given this definition, reconciliation may occur as a result of a renegotiated relationship based upon coming to terms with the offense. As we will see shortly, such a renegotiation of a relationship is a transformation of perspective.

Alternatively, William R. Neblett (1974) postulates that forgiveness may be viewed as a cognitive decision, in which the forgiver determines to forgive and proclaims: “I forgive you” (p. 269). Baskin and Enright (2004) indicate that when the decision to forgive is made the forgiver crosses a barrier and thereby decides to move “from a position of resentment to one of not letting the resentment dominate the interaction” (pp. 80-81). Also, Baskin and Enright assert that by their proclamation and decision, the forgiver “is consciously aware of his or her new position” (p. 81). Lastly, the researchers indicate that the decision to forgive does not mean that the forgiver forgets; it means that the forgiver recognizes their identity as the one, who forgives and extends forgiveness to the offender, who is “worthy of respect” (p. 81).

Johnson (2012) indicates that Enright, Rique, Freedman, and other researchers have developed a model to assist “people forgive” (p. 130); the model consists of four phases: “Uncovering, Decision, Work, and Deepening” (Baskin & Enright, 2004, p. 80). I think that their model is a helpful construct by which to approach forgiveness; nevertheless, for this study, and to build upon this model, I would like to modify it accordingly.

Remembering (*uncovering*) means to recall or bring back to memory. It is important to remember the past and bring back to memory the history, heritage, and culture of the Jewish people and the thousand-year role that they have played in Polish and Jewish history. Through educating people about the Shoah, The Matzevah Foundation leads people to remember and then to act.

Restoring (*decision*)—by restoring Jewish cemeteries The Matzevah Foundation honors the past and influences the present. As Christians, we decide to deal with the painful history of the Shoah today, seeking to bring Jew and Christian together in a communal act of loving-kindness, a mitzvah to care for and restore Jewish cemeteries.

Forgiving (*work*)—in this stage, the person who has suffered the injustice attempts to “understand (not condone) the victimizer’s background and motivation” (Johnson, 2012, p. 130). The key in this stage is absorbing pain. In a sense, The Matzevah Foundation becomes intercessors between Jews—Jews of Polish descent and Christians. Even though Christians were not the initiators of the Shoah, they were neighbors in Poland (and other European countries) who were periodically anti-Semitic, ambivalent, or unable to help their Jewish neighbors.

Reconciling (*deepening*)—the outcomes of forgiveness are for the person, who forgives, would be a deeper understanding of suffering, their “own need for forgiveness,” and an appreciation for support found among friends and institutions such as congregations. Ultimately Johnson (2012) concludes that the forgiving person “may develop a new purpose in life and find peace” (p. 132). Connecting to this conclusion, another outcome possibly could be reconciliation.

In light of this theoretical framework, Johnson (2012) concludes that “forgiveness is accomplished” in the third phase, when “the forgiver decides to endure suffering, rather than pass it on thereby breaking the cycle of evil” (p. 130). Furthermore, when considered in this manner, he asserts that “forgiveness is a gift of mercy to the wrongdoer” (p. 130).

### **Perspective Transformation**

Jack Mezirow (1978) theorizes that it is possible to change what he calls the “meaning perspective,” which is the “structure of cultural assumptions within which new experience is assimilated to—and transformed by—one’s past experience” (p. 101). He views the meaning perspective as a model of how people understand themselves and their relationships. Furthermore, Mezirow contends that “certain challenges and dilemmas of adult life” may not be resolved through an ordinary course of action such as “learning more” about the problem or “how to cope with them more effectively” (p. 101). Resolving issues, such as “life crises,” requires reevaluation and development “in which familiar assumptions are challenged, and new directions and commitments are charted” (p. 101). Such a reassessment is accomplished “through critical analysis of the assumptions behind the roles we play,” and possibly lead “to successive levels of self-

development” (p. 101). The transformation of perspective could also guide people “to explore new life options” and “begin again” (p. 102).

According to Mezirow, Paulo Freire applies the concept of the transformation of perspective to education, as a means to “transform one’s frame of reference [meaning perspective] in fostering personal and social change” (p. 101). Mezirow postulates that some dilemma or crisis generates “pressure and anxiety” causing a “change in perspective” and leads to “a decision to take action,” or not to act at all; the choice to take action is critical in “personal development” (p. 105). As people act and embrace new perspectives, they “can never return to those in [their] past” and leads to maturity and wisdom being able to interpret “reality from a higher perspective” (p. 106). He states that resolving the dilemmas of life and “transforming our meaning perspectives” demand that we must be “critically aware” of our life history and “reliving it;” we must also be aware of “the cultural and psychological assumptions” that create the framework of “the way we see ourselves and others” (p. 109). This type of shift in the meaning perspective may only occur when we adopt “the perspective of others, who have a more critical awareness of the psychocultural assumptions “ that determine “our histories and experience” (p. 109).

Edward Taylor (2007), in his review of the literature, summarizes empirical research concerning the transformative learning theory, which proposes “a theory of learning that is uniquely adult, abstract and idealized, grounded in the nature of human communication” (p. 173). Mezirow (1996) defines what he terms “Transformation Theory [as] an evolving theory of adult education,” based upon twelve proposals (p. 162). Of interest to me is his second proposition in which he states, “Learning is understood as



the process of using a prior interpretation to construe a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of one's experience in order to guide future action" (p. 162).

Taylor further emphasizes one of the "essential factors" found in a "transformative experience" is based upon building relationships with other people, who trust each other (p. 179); transformational learning is not abstract but a rather concrete and mutual experience. It is through these "trustful relationships" that people are able to engage in dialogue, discuss and share information freely, which allows them to "achieve mutual, consensual understanding" (p. 179). Several factors emerged from Taylor's literature review that fostered transformative learning. First, Taylor points to a consensus of thought, as represented by Pohland and Bova, MacLeod *et al.*, Mallory, Feinstein, and King, regarding the quality of the learning experience that must be "direct, personally engaging and stimulate reflection," which is a "powerful tool for fostering transformative learning" (p. 182). In some studies, such as MacLeod *et al.* in 2003, students were required to cope with emotional issues, which fostered in them empathy recognizing "the emotions generated by the situation" (p. 182).

Educators need to recognize when students are open to or are ready for a transformative experience. Understanding when students are prepared for such an experience may be determined by educators listening carefully to the responses of students to questions, as seen in Lange's 2004 study, which "found students using terms such as 'crossroads,' to describe their life" (p. 183). Additionally, among students, the concept of liminality plays a role. Jennifer Berger (2004) focuses her research upon the "edge of knowing," which she considers to be "the most precarious—and [an] important—transformative space" (p. 338). She postulates, "It is in this liminal space that

we can come to terms with the limitations of our knowing and thus begin to stretch those limits” (p. 338).

Taylor contemplates how educators can practically facilitate and form a transformative experience. First, based on the findings of Liimatainen *et al.* in 2001 and Kreber in 2004, he argues that “critical reflection research” is essential to transformative learning, but warns researchers not to consider “all forms of reflection are equally significant” (p. 186). Second, Taylor recommends that research should be conducted in less formal settings, which could foster a transformative learning experience for adult students, especially within frameworks that “are more informal, less controlled by the instructor, and more susceptible to external influences (e.g., natural environment, public)” (p. 186). This particular conclusion coincides well with the public nature of the work of TMF in caring for and restoring Jewish cemeteries in Poland, which should potentially foster a transformative learning experience for adult participants. Third, Taylor points to findings from studies that “the role of relationships in transformative learning [are] significant” (p. 187), and researchers need to ponder the nature of transformative relationships.

### **Experiential Learning**

David Kolb (2015) postulates that “experiential learning” is a “particular form of learning from life experience,” and frequently, this type of learning is “contrasted with lecture and classroom learning” (p. xviii). Kolb points out that some researchers, such as Buchmann and Schwill in 1983, reject this type of educational approach; instead, they advance the idea that “formal education is to overcome the biases inherent in the process of learning from ongoing life experience” (p. xix). According to Kolb, Experiential

Learning Theory (ELT) advances a theory that “helps to explain how experience is transformed into learning and reliable knowledge” (p. xxi). Kolb ties ELT to the work of Dewey, Lewin, and Piaget; he also connects experience to ELT because it emphasizes “the central role that experience plays in the learning process” (p. 31). Kolb characterizes experiential learning by the following propositions (pp. 37-49):

- Learning is best conceived as a process, not in terms of outcomes
- Learning is a continuous process grounded in experience
- The process of learning requires the resolution of conflicts between

dialectically opposed modes of adaptation to the world

- Learning is a holistic process of adaptation to the world
- Learning involves transactions between the person and the environment
- Learning is the process of creating knowledge

Learning, according to Kolb, may be defined as “the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience” (p. 49). This particular definition reinforces a few major emphases concerning experience from the experiential perspective. First, it emphasizes “the process of adaptation and learning” over and against “content or outcomes” (pp. 49-50). Second, “knowledge is a transformation process” that is constantly “created and recreated,” and it is not an autonomous object that may “be acquired or transmitted” (p. 50). Third, “learning transforms experience” objectively and subjectively, and finally, for us to comprehend learning, “we must understand the nature of knowledge, and vice versa” (p. 50).

## Summary, Implications, and Discussion

Jewish-Christian tension is long-standing and unique from the perspective that Judaism and Christianity share a common root in the expression of their religious faith. Despite their common heritage, Christians have all too often allowed their dyadic hatred and misguided beliefs regarding the Jews to shape their perspective of the Jews, allowing them to be marginalized, mistreated, and murdered. The Shoah was a terrible chapter in the history of humanity, and the rupture that it created only exasperated this division and deepened the strife between Jews and Christians.

Notwithstanding, Karpen (2002) reasons that the events of the Shoah drew Jews and Christians closer to each other “in a significant if [not] problematic way” (p. 2) by forcing them to address the breakdown of the social order of their era. He concludes that the Shoah, like a looming threat, “stands behind all Jewish-Christian conversation” (p. 2), reminding them of the rupture. He tells us that “the hesitancy of the churches to deal seriously” with the Shoah and the historical break that it produced “still continues to divide Jews and Christians” (p. 112). Christians cannot ignore the Shoah; they must remember and reconsider what should be their response.

Research to this point has focused on institutional Jewish-Christian relations and interfaith dialogue, but virtually no studies have been conducted addressing the interaction and dialogue among ordinary people—everyday Jews and Christians. Indisputably, there is a need for dialogue among Jews and Christians that would possibly lead to healing wounds, allowing forgiveness and reconciliation to emerge and be experienced. Though steps have been attempted to heal the rift and close the gap between Jews and Christians, no real rationale has appeared that will address the lack of dialogue.

These attempts have been helpful and certainly provide some insights. Nonetheless, they do not go far enough.

What should be the Christian response to the Shoah? How might Christians respond to it today? What role does dialogue play? The studies that I examined regarding reconciliation point to the importance of remembering the Shoah and connecting that memory to the horizontal dimension to reconciliation. By linking memory with social action, restoration may occur, and healing may be experienced by those who have been traumatized by the Shoah. It is possible to connect the theories of Karpen to the work of TMF in remembering, restoring, and reconciling and thereby explore how Jews and Christians interact with one another within the framework of TMF and whether dialogue arises. Dialogue for the purpose of this study means seeking to discover new options, which provide insight, and a means by which Jews and Christians may reorder their knowledge about their “taken-for-granted assumptions” about each other that they “bring to the table” (Isaacs, 1999, p. 45).

Hoffman views the primary difficulty between Polish Catholics and Jews is that of mutual exclusion. Coupled with the inability “to create a common sphere of interests and concerns” both aspects appear to be significant factors that impacted interaction between Jews and Christian Poles—Poles did not want to include Jews fully, while the majority of Jews desired to keep on being separate and maintain their identity as a “nation” (Hoffman, 2000, p. 17).

In such a pattern of mutual exclusion, as Hoffman infers, Jews and Christians should embrace each other and thereby work toward inclusion focusing upon the creation of a shared “sphere of interests and concerns.” I term this sphere of interaction, building a

bridge of mercy—mercy, or acts of kindness based on the Jewish understanding of *chesed shel-emet*, “true loving-kindness” along with *gemilut chasadim*, “the giving of loving-kindness.”

In essence, I am attempting to create a third space, one of mutual inclusion that is uniquely found within the work of TMF as it relates to a Jewish cemetery in Poland. The third space may be understood as the liminal space of a Jewish cemetery in which Jews and Christians may meet, interact with each other through the giving of true loving-kindness, and possibly learn how to dialogue. At this juncture, I hypothesize that Jewish-Christian dialogue may occur within the construct of TMF and the liminal space of a Jewish cemetery in Poland. It is not yet clear as to whether or not that dialogue will occur in the third space of TMF; however, I assume that it will.

Like Halina Birenbaum, I find myself in the third space, the middle space between Jew and Christian. I have come to understand that neither group understands me. I live between two cultures, a third culture, but I am neither. I see myself as a hybrid. I have elements of both within me. Sometimes, I am misunderstood, so I work to understand and reconcile the two. I am learning about myself and who I am. I am also learning about the work of reconciliation through leading TMF to remember the Shoah and its victims by caring for and leading others to restore Jewish cemeteries in Poland. I do not have an answer regarding what I will discover via my study, or how all of this works out because what I am doing is emerging and unfixed. However, I find peace in what I am doing.

## CHAPTER 3

### RESEARCH METHODS

#### **Introduction**

My study examined the interaction of people, who were volunteers working with, or who are associated with the work of The Matzevah Foundation (TMF). These volunteers included Jewish descendants, students, Poles, Americans, religious and non-religious Jews, Christians, and others. These volunteers worked with each other in social action projects within the liminal space of the Jewish cemetery in Poland. They cleaned and cleared Jewish cemeteries of undergrowth, debris, and garbage. Additionally, volunteers searched for buried or broken fragments of matzevot to gather vital genealogical information.

The purpose of this study was to describe the process of how acts of loving-kindness (mercy), as demonstrated and encountered through the work of TMF in caring for and restoring Jewish cemeteries in Poland, have influenced dialogue (or lack thereof) among Jews and Christians. The study explored mercy as the language of dialogue, and the organization that I lead, TMF, illustrated that dialogue. Mercy may be operationalized and understood in terms of “loving acts” (Johnson, 2012, p. 127); loving acts may be corroborated by humane orientation, concern for others, compassion, charity, and altruism.

In order to explore how those involved and those affected by the work of TMF have developed in their relationship with one another, I pursued the following research questions: How have Jews and Christians responded to the work of TMF? In what ways did Jews and Christians learn how to dialogue through their mutual interaction within the context of the work of TMF? This chapter is organized according to the following sections: case study design, self as the research instrument, research sample, data collection methods, data analysis, issues of trustworthiness, generalizability, ethical considerations, and chapter summary.

### **Case Study Design**

This study was conducted as a qualitative case study of the work of TMF. The case study method of inquiry was best because it involves the investigation of a case—The Matzevah Foundation and its work within the framework of “real-life, contemporary context or setting,” which is defined “within a bounded system” such as “time and place” (Creswell, 2013, p. 97). Through inquiry of the interaction of Jew and Christian within the construct [third space or liminal space] of the work of TMF, I sought to understand how *gemilut chasadim* or acts of loving-kindness (mercy) influenced attitudes and created mutual bridges of understanding as to the underpinning for dialogue. Principally, I studied the responses of people individually and corporately to open-ended questions about their experience in working with TMF in its educational initiatives and its Jewish cemetery restoration projects in Poland.

The research site was the work of TMF, and consequently, I will provide a brief historical synopsis of TMF. Since 2005, a group of Baptist Christians has been working with the Jewish Community of Poland in restoring Jewish cemeteries, which are known



in Hebrew as *Beit Chaim*, or “the house of the living” and are considered holy places by religious Jews. TMF grew out of this relationship, advancing it today as a non-profit, public charity, which primarily serves the Jewish community of Poland and cooperates with the global Jewish community of Polish origins to care for and restore Jewish cemeteries in Poland.

The vision of TMF is to remember and honor the Jewish heritage of Poland by restoring Jewish cemeteries and reconciling Jews and Christians through participating in a mutual mitzvah. Stated simply, we remember, restore and reconcile. The mission of TMF is twofold.

1. It mobilizes human and financial resources to care for and preserve the Jewish heritage of Poland by restoring Jewish cemeteries.
2. It educates the public regarding anti-Semitism and the history of Polish Jews before, during, and following the Shoah in Poland.

### **Self as the Research Instrument**

In light of the fact that in qualitative inquiries, the researcher is the primary instrument for gathering and analyzing data, I should share a few things about myself that have influenced me personally and have given direction to my research. I will look at six main periods of my development as a researcher from being a photojournalist (an observer), the parallels of photojournalism and qualitative research, documenting my journey, becoming a participant observer, becoming an activist, and that of an emerging researcher.

## Photojournalist

The first principal component of my life that is relevant to my role as a researcher is that of being a photojournalist. Intrinsicly, I have been a professional observer for most of my adult life. I continuously view the world around me, frequently, recording what I see in photographs. The difference between life, as it is, and documenting life in photographs is often selective; it is the same in qualitative research. One key element that I have learned about selective photography is photographing what is present without trying to understand what is occurring necessarily before my lens. Observation, of course, leads to interpretation, but this is after the fact. If I wish to add my pre-conceptions or prejudices to how I photograph a particular subject, I would lose my objectivity and become an editor, who interprets and editorializes about what is being seen. If I were to editorialize the photographic process, I would be looking for a photograph that fits my narrative. The same could be true for researchers as observers.

## Parallels of Photojournalism and Qualitative Research

It is important to note that I was not formally trained as a photojournalist; however, after I earned my bachelor's degree, I did take a few photography courses and several masters' level courses in journalism and photojournalism. For the most part, I realized that I was a photographer who desired to document life in a journalistic fashion. When I was first beginning to work as a photojournalist in 1984 at a small, daily newspaper in East Texas, I began to grow and develop as a photojournalist. I taught myself the basics of photojournalism by reading newspapers and magazines and studying the work of other photojournalists. I would ponder their compositions, analyzing the lens selection, point of view, and technical acumen of noteworthy photographs. I did this not

to emulate their work but to understand their frame of reference and approach to photojournalism.

In qualitative research, Creswell (2013) echoes the tenets of my practice as a means to “learn how to write a qualitative study” by reading published articles and studies, and then “looking closely at the way they [are] composed” (p. 111). As a photojournalist, I had to learn to be an observer who assessed and tried to bring meaning to the events that I covered. I had to make declarative statements about what I saw through my lens, which at times allowed me to interject my own bias, or how I saw and interpreted unfolding events. Most of the time, I was objective, and I captured events as they unfolded; however, at other times, I was able to be interpretive in how I photographed the actions that I covered. Generally, photojournalists do not interact with, nor try to influence their subjects in any way. We do this so that we might capture or photograph our subjects *in situ*—as is, not staged photographs. Such an approach, of course, is the practice of a purist, who desires to be ethical and capture life as it is; however, the discipline is and has been at times compromised much like research through bias and unethical attempts to skew data toward more favorable results.

It is difficult for photojournalists to step from behind the lens ordinarily and become involved in what they see. Doing so hampers the thinking and seeing process; nonetheless, it is possible, and by so doing, a photojournalist may become an activist advocating and participating in a particular cause, much like an ethnographer might do in qualitative research. For me, one thing that I had to do was to move from one who was documenting real life, to someone who was engaging compassionately in life. I could no longer be an observer, but I had to become a participant and had to learn how to mobilize,

lead, and equip people for engaging life and dealing with its concerns. I became an activist—a partisan, so to speak as one of my Polish-Jewish friends viewed it, when I began to work with the Jewish community of Poland. As a qualitative researcher, I have become more directly involved in the process of observation, and I see that my role is more in line with that of being both a participant and a participant observer.

### Documenting my Journey

When I first journeyed to Poland in December of 1988, I did not have any awareness about Jewish cemeteries, or that I would become involved in them. I knew that Poland was a country behind the Iron Curtain, and it had suffered and lost much in WWII. I also knew that Poland lost much of its Jewish population at the hand of Hitler and his systematic liquidation of six million European Jews in Nazi Germany's death camps of occupied Poland and the killing fields of Eastern Europe.

I went to Poland with a group of Baptist men who were to visit Baptist churches in Poland and the former Soviet Union. I, of course, went to document our journey and to write a few stories. On the day of my arrival, nearly fifty years after the war, I saw the physical scars that remained in several buildings along the streets to the place where I was to be staying. I saw bombed-out shells of apartment buildings, still in ruins, haphazardly nestled among the many, gray, and starkly standing post-war, communist-era apartments scattered along the route. I was troubled by what I saw, but I did not understand its significance.

All the while in Poland, the thought was in my mind that the Jews, G-d's people were annihilated here in this place. The thought was like a lurking mist that would not melt away entirely from the confines of my mind. While in Białystok, Poland, our group

visited a synagogue in Tykocin not far from Białystok. Tykocin had once been home to a sizeable Jewish community. All that remained now of that community was the synagogue, and it had become a museum—no longer an active synagogue. The murky, shadowy thought resurfaced. The Jews were gone; only traces of them remained. I made a few photographs of the interior of the synagogue, mostly of the walls and the apparent Hebrew inscriptions. I did not understand the inscriptions, but they spoke to me of what was lost as a consequence of the Shoah. I felt its weight, but the events of the Shoah were still abstract to me.

Once we returned to Warsaw, I took a train with our group to Lublin, Poland, where the Nazi Death Camp, Majdanek, is located. For the first time while in Poland, the mist—the murkiness of the Shoah began to ebb away, and its reality emerged. I saw traces of the Shoah first-hand, and I understood the truth of its horror when I walked across the cold and broad expanse of Majdanek. As I walked, I made several photographs of the camp along the way, concentrating on the fences and guard towers. My journey ended at a massive memorial urn—something that looked like a domed stadium only smaller. I did not have much time, but I made a few photographs of what I saw. The urn contained a mound of human remains consumed in the ovens of the crematorium, as portrayed in Photograph 3. What remained were the ashes of thousands of Jewish, Polish, and Russian victims, who were murdered in the gas chambers, or died in hard labor at the camp. While at the urn, I also made a photograph of a matzevah for the first time. I did not make the connection of these events with the symbolic meaning of a matzevah until much, much later in my life; however, one other incident played a significant role in my journey of understanding.

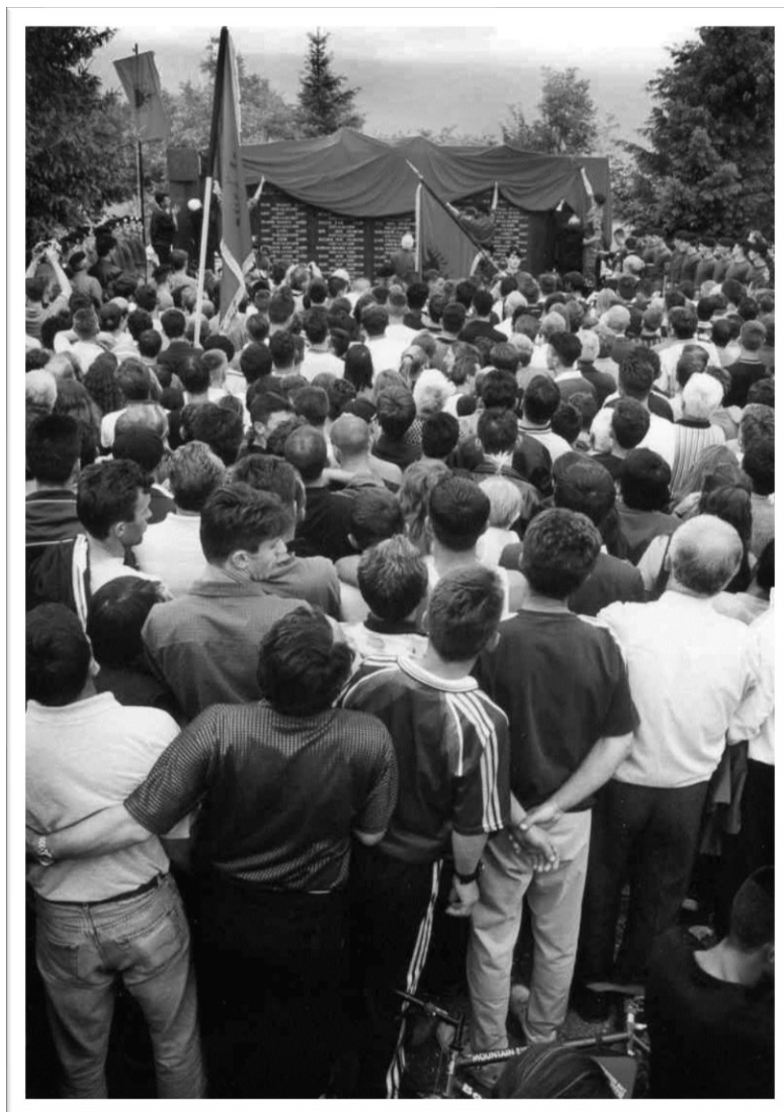


*Photograph 3. A Memorial Urn at Majdanek Death Camp*

The memorial urn with ashes of victims of the Shoah at Majdanek, Nazi Concentration and Death Camp, near Lublin, Poland, December 1988. © Copyright 1988-2019 by Steven D. Reece.

### Becoming a Participant Observer

Between 1999 and 2001, I became involved in the on-going humanitarian relief effort during and following the war in Kosovo. One day, I was invited to a ceremony honoring the memory of the forty-one (41) Albanian Muslim men, who were murdered at the hand of their Serbian Orthodox neighbors. Serbian paramilitary militiamen entered the village of *Qyshkut* on May 14, 1999, and rounded up the men, placing them in three houses. The militiamen executed the men and then set the houses on fire; one man in each house managed to survive the ordeal. Upon the first anniversary of the massacre on May 14, 2000, the community gathered for an unveiling ceremony of a large matzevah, as shown in Photograph 4.



*Photograph 4. A Matzevah Unveiling in Kosovo*

Family and friends gather for the unveiling ceremony for the memorial matzevah for the massacre in Qyshkut, Kosovo, May 2000. © Copyright 2000-2019 by Steven. D. Reece.

This occurrence was the second time that I photographed the unveiling of a matzevah following a tragic event. The first time that I photographed such a memorial—a matzevah was on the first anniversary of the Luby’s Cafeteria Massacre on October 16, 1992, in Killeen, Texas (Photograph 5). At the time, I was a photojournalist covering the



*Photograph 5. A Matzevah as a Memorial to Mass Murder in U.S.*

In October 1992, on the one year anniversary of the Luby's Cafeteria massacre, children of survivors place flowers at the matzevah commemorating the lives of their loved ones, who were murdered by a lone gunman in Killen, Texas on October 16, 1991. © Copyright 1992-2019 by Steven. D. Reece.

story. In Kosovo, I was a participant-observer, who took part in the raising of funds to secure the matzevah, and I was an observer, who documented the unveiling ceremony.



On the day of the observance, I realized that it was a public expression of grief and the large stone—the matzevah was a way for the villagers to honor the memory of the men and loved ones who were murdered.

### Becoming an Activist

In May 2001, one year following the unveiling of the *Qyshkut* memorial, I once more returned to Warsaw, Poland, with my wife and children to live and work. Before our return, I was in Warsaw on my way to meet my wife for dinner. Along the way, I stumbled upon the only surviving synagogue in Warsaw following WWII and the Shoah. I knew what I observed was significant, but I did not understand what I was seeing or why I stopped. As I stood there, I pondered what I was seeing for the first time. In a sense, the synagogue spoke silently to me. I did not understand completely; nevertheless, I began to connect my experience in Kosovo to what I saw in Warsaw in front of this synagogue.

In Kosovo, I had frequently heard first-hand eyewitness testimony from people who lost neighbors and loved ones to the crimes of hatred and genocide. I realized in Warsaw that this synagogue was significant—it represented a remnant of the Shoah; however, I did not fully grasp the significance of these two events (in Kosovo and Warsaw), and how they were connected until much, much later.

In June 2004, my understanding changed almost immediately when I had a conversation with a waitress named Anna in a restaurant in Otwock (a city just outside of Warsaw). I was working with a Polish Baptist church in this city doing community work with a group of young Baptist college students from the United States. Anna was interested in me and what I was doing with this group of young college students in her

city. She asked me every day and at every meal; a great many questions concerning our activities, what we are doing, and why. Anna was very pleased with our work and the good that we were doing for her city.

One morning quite unexpectedly, she suggested that I take these young people to visit the Jewish cemetery not far from where we were staying. “There is a Jewish cemetery here?” I asked curiously. “Yes,” she said. Being culturally aware, I then asked her very politely this question: “*Czy ma Pani pochodzenie Żydowskie*” (Madam, are you of Jewish descent)? She simply replied, “Yes.” Then she added, “There are many of us here, who live in hiding.”

After I took the group to see the Jewish cemetery in the middle of a forest, I began to consider a series of questions from my encounter with Anna:

1. What was significant about that Jewish cemetery to Anna?
2. What was the meaning of a cemetery to a Jew or someone who had Jewish heritage?
3. What would I do in the face of the aftermath of the Shoah?

#### An Emerging Researcher

Answering these questions led to a significant change in my life. I became a researcher, and I began to develop my knowledge base and my understanding of the importance of Jewish cemeteries, the history of WWII, and the Shoah. On a personal level from my research and my experience, I became aware of the troubled history of the two largest communities of Poland: the Roman Catholic and Jewish communities. I realized that I was not part of either of these two communities, neither the Roman

Catholic community nor the Jewish community. In fact, the Polish government placed me in a third category—a third community—the Baptist Christian community.

If you are not familiar with the difference between the Roman Catholic Christian and the Baptist Christian, I will repeat for you what I told a Jewish woman one Tuesday evening in Warsaw. She asked me, “I know that you are a Christian, but tell me who you are as a Baptist.” I told her that we gather to worship the One True G-d, we study Scripture, we pray, and someone teaches. In other words, Baptist Christians are not like Roman Catholics, who pray to the saints and have confessionals, priests, and ceremonies. Our practice is based on what we learned from the Scriptures and the Jewish community. We follow the simple pattern of synagogue worship.

When I lived in Poland, it was not difficult to find evidence of WWII; it is evident in the lives of nearly every single, living person, and through the pot-marks of bullets or shell fragments. Their scars are engraved on the exterior walls of numerous buildings throughout the country, but more so in Warsaw, the Polish capital. I lived in Warsaw for nearly eight years. Our youngest son was born in Warsaw in 1997, and we returned home to live and work in the U.S. on his birthday in 2008. While I lived in Warsaw, I photographed places associated with the war or with the Shoah. I also read a great many books on these two subjects. In my efforts to research and understand the war and the Shoah, several themes emerged and caught my attention:

1. The anti-Semitism of Polish and Jewish relations before, during, and following WWII.
2. The social change in the villages of Poland as people moved to the cities.
3. Adolf Hitler’s invasion of Poland.

4. *Aktion Reinhard* (Operation Reinhard)—Hitler’s plan for death camps to exterminate Jews upon arrival. *Aktion’s* three extermination camps were all in Poland: Treblinka, Sobibor, and Belzec.

5. Auschwitz and its culminating role in what we now know as the Shoah.

As the magnitude of the Shoah began to weigh on me, I tried to grasp the scope and the scale of the tragedy; nevertheless, I could not even begin to wrap my mind around what had happened and why. Eventually, my inquiry led me not to contemplate and write, but to act. Consequently, I approached the Jewish community with a simple question: Could I bring Baptist (Christian) volunteers to care for this neglected Jewish cemetery, in the middle of a forest outside of Otwock, Poland?

When the Chief Rabbi of Poland’s representative asked me why I would want to do such a thing, I merely responded with one word, *pojednanie*, which means in English reconciliation. He said, “Ok.” With that one word, I began a new path toward reconciliation by caring for and restoring Jewish cemeteries in Poland. Ultimately, my journey led me to form The Matzevah Foundation in late 2010.

It is essential to close this section with a quote from Michael Gawenda (2014), an Australian Jew of Polish ancestry, who wrote a story about his journey to Poland and his efforts to trace his family’s past. Reflecting upon his journey, he wrote:

The past is never settled, but nor can it be denied. Poland will always be a place of darkness for Jews, especially Jews of Polish origin. But on this mild Polish late autumn day, with the lukewarm rays of the sun illuminating the glass panels, the museum felt like a place of fragile but determined optimism. Standing there in front of the museum, I thought of the children of Sandomierz and I thought of Zuzanna and her campaign against the bookshop in the basement of her church, and I thought of Jakub, who referred to me as a fellow *landsmann* of Lowicz, and I thought about how the story of a thousand years of Polish Jewish history did not have to end in a cemetery (para. 76-77).

As Gawenda concludes, I did not want the story of my journey to end in a forgotten Jewish cemetery. Instead, I wondered: What if a new story began?

### **Research Sample**

Qualitative research relies upon the purposeful selection of the participants. Michael Patton (2002) termed the selection of the research sample as “*purposeful*” (p. 230), while Sharan Merriam (2009) viewed this selection as “purposive sampling” (p. 77). The rationale behind these concepts is to select “information-rich cases, with the objective of yielding insight and understanding of the phenomenon under investigation” (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012, p. 104).

Moreover, Creswell (2012) reminds us that qualitative researchers are to “develop an in-depth exploration of a central phenomenon” and for this reason, it is best for the researcher to purposefully select individuals and sites to be studied (p. 206). Consequently, I selected specific participants (and sites) primarily for this study using the criterion of Patton (2002) as to whether or not participants were “information-rich” (p. 237) and had knowledge of and experience with the work of TMF in the U.S. or Poland.

Participants in this study, therefore, were derived from a pool of fifteen individuals, as demonstrated in Table 1, who have had interaction with the work of TMF. Eleven individuals have had direct association and interaction with me personally, or in some capacity of my leadership of TMF. Four individuals were selected from two summer project locations in Poland and were interviewed along with four other TMF volunteers and board members in two focus groups. Six participants were Jewish, while six individuals were Christians; the remaining three participants were non-Jewish and primarily non-religious.

Table 1

*Demographic Composition of Research Sample*

	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentages</i>
<u>Age Group</u>		
20-35	7	46.7
36-45	3	20.0
46+	5	33.3
Total	15	100.0
<u>Educational Level</u>		
Bachelors	7	46.7
Masters/Doctorates	8	53.3
Total	15	100.0
<u>Religious Identity</u>		
Jewish	6	40.0
Christian	6	40.0
Not Stated	3	20.0
Total	15	100.0
<u>Nationality</u>		
American	10	66.7
Polish	2	13.3
United Kingdom	3	20.0
Total	15	100.0
<u>Gender</u>		
Male	6	40.0
Female	9	60.0
Total	15	100.0

The work of TMF embraces a diverse group of volunteers, including Polish Jews, Jews of Polish descent, Polish Catholics and Evangelicals, U.S. Evangelical Christians, and non-believers. Project participants are not just Americans but are international, residing not only in Poland but are from countries such as Germany, Austria, Ukraine,

and Israel. TMF also works with community and governmental leaders in Poland and has developed collaborative partnerships with Jewish institutions in the U.S. and Poland.

What connects this diverse group of people primarily is the work of caring for neglected Jewish cemeteries in Poland. Typically, volunteers are involved in an intensive week of labor in which they experience first-hand the loss of the Shoah by cleaning or removing debris and restoring some aspect of the Jewish cemetery. Usually, volunteers spend free time together, such as going for coffee, or in structured seminars where difficult issues are explored.

Data collection involved developing unique perspectives of the case that I examined (TMF). Primarily my data collection relied upon employing two sampling strategies: maximal variation sampling and homogeneous sampling. According to Creswell (2012), maximum variation sampling presents “multiple perspectives of individuals to represent the complexity of our world;” likewise, it is a sampling strategy that allows researchers to explore differences “on some characteristic or trait” among individuals and sites (pp. 207-208).

What I found appealing in the use of the maximum variation strategy was that it allowed me to develop numerous perspectives on how participants viewed acts of loving-kindness (mercy) as experienced in the work of TMF. Individual participants “differ on some characteristic or trait” (Creswell, 2012, pp. 207-208), and in my case study, I purposefully selected Jewish, Christian, and somewhat neutral participants who did not indicate their religious identity. The trait (or characteristic) of interest to me was primarily the religious, moral, or ethical views of the participants. Consequently, to what

degree did these particular religious or moral perspectives factor into the participant's understanding of love of neighbor, mercy, concern, or compassionate caring for others?

An alternative sampling strategy for my case study was that of homogeneous sampling, which focuses upon the selection of participants "because they possess a similar trait or characteristic" (Creswell, 2012, p. 208). The participants in my study were derived primarily from the Jewish and Christian communities; however, one group, as I noted above, was selected from a group of European students who may be religiously neutral or secular. According to Creswell (2013), selecting participants based on the homogeneous sampling method "facilitates group interviewing" (p. 158). Since I conducted two focus groups, one of the groups was homogeneously comprised of European university students, and the other group was not homogeneous per se but was composed of Christians and Jews who interacted within the work of TMF.

### **Data Collection**

Creswell (2013) considers that there are four basic approaches to data collection: (a) observations, (b) interviews, (c) documents, and (d) audiovisual materials (p. 160). Concerning observation, I found it interesting how he categorizes the observer into four types (Creswell, 2013, p. 166):

1. Complete participant—the researcher is "fully engaged" with the process of observation.
2. Participant as an observer—the researcher participates in the activity, which enables him or her to "gain insider views and subjective data."



3. Nonparticipant/observer as a participant—the researcher participates with those being observed as an outsider, “watching and taking notes from a distance” without direct interaction.

4. Complete observer—the researcher is not visible or “noticed” by the people being studied.

As a former photojournalist, I functioned primarily as a complete observer when I interacted with and photographed an unfolding news event. At times, I had to relate to a subject when shooting a portrait or an illustration for a story, explaining or telling them what I needed them to do (directive work, providing direction to the person). As a researcher, I realized that due to the nature of my work with TMF, I was more directly involved with the process of observation and saw that my role as an observer was more in line with that of being both a participant and a participant observer.

#### Sources of Data

Sources of data for this case study were derived from direct observations of participants, interviews, participant-observations, and documents/artifacts such as articles, photographs, emails, and personal reflective journals.

#### **Focus Groups**

When researching focus groups, I discovered the work of Moloney (2011). She conducted a qualitative case study among Australian women. The primary focus of her research was the treatment of focus groups as a transformative space for spiritual encounters (liminal space, as seen in terms of a focus group). Moloney concluded that the focus group is a “sacred container” that possibly signifies “the hope that as human nature evolves it can transform itself into its greater spiritual potential” (p. 71). She introduced

me to the value of focus groups in qualitative research, and how I could employ them as a type of liminal space, in which Jews and Christians could interact. This space allows them to dialogue more freely about critical issues confronting them. In my study, focus groups permitted people to explore “the construction and negotiation of meanings” (p. 58).

As encountered in the review of the literature, liminality (or liminal space) is a concept that describes being between or in the middle of two spaces, literally in-between the two. Liminality may be compared to the front porch of a house, which is a threshold space that allows people to transition from the outside of a home to the inside or vice versa. Based on Moloney’s view of the focus group, I explored the in-between space, a liminal space in which positive change in the relationship between Jew and Christian emerged.

Beech (2011) considers the notion of Watson (2009), who contends that an “individual’s self-identity [is] the individual’s own notion of who and what they are” (p. 431). Additionally, Watson postulates that “individuals must look to the *external* aspects of human identities and to *social-identities*: cultural, discursive or institutional notions of who or what any individual might be” (p. 431). Beech (2011) reasons that social contexts “frame the possibilities that people have for creating and recognizing meaning in their interactions” (p. 290). I take this to mean that people choose how they interpret their interactions with other people in the social construct and daily narrative of life.

In my study, the focus group functioned as a powerful liminal space in which participants were able to consider their individual and collective viewpoints regarding Jewish-Christian dialogue. As such, the focus group enabled me to explore issues of

spiritual or religious identity among Jews and Christians; and allowed Jews and Christians deeply to share what troubled them in their souls regarding the gulf that separates them. Such an undertaking was not be done for conversion but for dialogue and mutual understanding.

Although Jews and Christians share a similar religious heritage or foundational faith—the belief in the One True G-d, religious Jews view dialogue with Christians differently depending upon their particular tradition of Judaism: no dialogue, limited dialogue, and full dialogue. Interestingly these Jewish dialogue positions are formulated from (a) the Torah (be separate from the Gentile), (b) the long-standing Jewish experience with anti-Semitism (2,000-year history of Jewish-Christian interaction), and (c) the Shoah. As a Christian leader and in my case, dialogue with Jews occurs within a very explicit context of the liminal space of a Jewish cemetery in Poland created by TMF and its work into which both Jews and Christians must selectively choose to enter.

In this study, TMF worked in two Jewish cemeteries in Poland. Participants in these projects resided at a local hotel and educational center. Therefore, I conducted focus group interviews at these locations in public meeting rooms. Since I used the focus group as a means to interview several people at once, I formed two focus groups, one in each location comprised of four participants each.

One focus group was a somewhat neutral group of individuals consisting of one TMF board member and three Europeans from a university, who were first-time participants in a TMF Jewish cemetery restoration project. The second focus group was comprised of four individuals: two American-Christians (one TMF board member and a first-time volunteer) and two American Jews of Polish descent (one friend and one first-

time volunteer). I conducted these two focus group interviews in the summer of 2016 in Poland during two weeklong, TMF Jewish cemetery restoration projects.

### **Individual Interviews**

As McMillan and Schumacher (2010) indicate, qualitative researchers, use interviews as a common strategy in data collection because it allows them to ask “open-response questions.” This methodology allows the researcher to obtain data regarding “how individuals conceive of their world and how they explain or make sense of important events in their lives” (p. 355). Creswell (2012) states that qualitative researchers use “general, open-ended questions” and record participant responses as a means to explore a central phenomenon with “one or more participants” (p. 217). Accordingly, participant responses are also open-ended, allowing participants “to create the options for responding” (Creswell, 2012, p. 218).

According to Rudestam and Newton (2007), the interview itself functions primarily as a lens by which “to focus [the] discussion on the research questions of the study” (p. 109). Consequently, Rudestam and Newton conclude that open-ended interview questions are tools used to lead participants in the study “to reflect on [the] experience and its implications in his or her life” (p. 109). Furthermore, they state that questions along these lines encourage the participants “to focus on the incident or the phenomenon” as a means to “describe the experience” relating their actions, comments, feelings, and thoughts (p. 110). By using follow-up questions, Rudestam and Newton (2007) suggest that researchers may “encourage the interviewee to dig deeper and reflect on the meaning of the experience” (p. 110).

Ideally, Creswell (2013) suggests that in a case study design, the researcher should interview “a few individuals” without giving a specific total number of individuals to be interviewed (p. 51). When gathering data from participants in a qualitative study, the fundamental principle to keep in view is what is termed as *useable data*. According to Morse (2000), an inverse relationship exists between the quantity of “useable data obtained from each participant and the number of participants” (p. 4). What this means, according to Morse, is that the higher the quantity of “useable data obtained from each person, the fewer the number of participants” (p. 4) are needed for the study.

Rich data emerges from information-rich sources, which ultimately means that the number of participants and the associated number of interviews is fewer—“perhaps only 6 to 10” (p. 5). According to Curtis et al. in 2000, and Walsh and Downe in 2006, rich or dense data concentrate on the research question allowing “the researcher to provide a convincing account of the phenomenon (cited in, Cleary, Horsfall, & Hayter, 2014, p. 473).

Considering the number and perspectives of participants for interviews that I conducted, I selected fifteen individuals who had contact, who had on-going interaction with me and the work of TMF, or who had first-time contact with the work of TMF.

Individuals were chosen from the following groupings:

1. *Jewish perspective*: an American rabbi and an American Jewish female.
2. *Polish-Jewish perspective*: a Jewish leader living in Warsaw and a rabbi living in Poland.
3. *Polish-Christian perspective*: a Polish Christian.
4. *Christian perspective*: four members of the Board of Directors of TMF.

5. *Neutral perspective*: three participants from a European university.
6. *Volunteer perspective*: two Jewish and one Christian volunteer.

## **Photographs**

Since 1988, I have been photographing aspects of life that I encountered primarily from my visits to or while living in Poland, but also while living in Kosovo. In the spring of 2014, I began to process my experiences in the context of my work and experiences with the Polish-Jewish community through photographic data that I have amassed over the years. I surveyed hundreds of negatives, slides, and digital images that I produced over nearly thirty years related to my journey. While studying these photographs, I asked myself questions such as these: Why did I photograph that particular subject? Or, what was going on in the scene that captured my interest? I aimed to recollect and see how my photographs have shaped my experience. I concentrated on photographs that I made specifically related to the Shoah, genocide, terrorism, Polish-Jewish cemeteries, and memorial ceremonies.

One alternative approach to the use of photographs as data that I discovered in the literature was to employ a data collection technique termed “photo elicitation” (Creswell, 2013, p. 161). Mostly this technique is founded upon the researcher using photographs to elicit responses of participants. Creswell explains that the researcher may use their photographs or use photographs of the participants. The researcher asks the participants to “discuss the contents of the pictures” as in 1994, Wang and Burris’ use of Photovoice (p. 161). Although useful as a research possibility, I did not employ the use of photographs in this manner for my study during focus group interviews.

## Observations

Marshall McLuhan, a Canadian philosopher, once said, “I wouldn’t have seen it, if I hadn’t believed it” (cited in, Kraig, 2012). How can a researcher be sure he/she has “seen” what they think they have seen? I have been a professional observer—a photojournalist for most of my adult life. I continually view the world around me frequently as photographs. The difference between life and capturing life in photographs is commonly selective; it is the same in qualitative research.

One key element that I have learned about selective photography is photographing what is present without trying to understand what is necessarily going on before my lens. Observation, of course, leads to interpretation, but this is after the fact. If I wish to add my pre-conceptions or prejudices to how I photograph a particular subject, I would lose my objectivity and become an editor, who interprets and editorializes about what is being seen. I would be looking for a photograph that fits my narrative.

The same could be true for researchers as observers. Being confident of what is being observed needs to be weighed against what the purpose of the research is. Am I, as a researcher, seeking to see what I am perceiving as fitting my narrative, or am I being objective in what I am seeing, allowing the scene to unfold and tell its own story? This dilemma may be the most significant risk facing researchers today. I would ask in light of this reality a simple question: Am I capturing what is there through my observations, or am I seeking to “editorialize” selectively seeing what is present? I kept this question before me constantly because the interpretation of what is unfolding is secondary to observation. Observation relies upon describing what is extant and asks informational

questions such as to who, what, and when? Interpretation goes to meaning by asking why, or how did this come to be?

I observed the responses of people (American Christians and Jews, Polish Christians, Polish Jews, and secular Europeans) who interacted with each other in two Jewish cemetery projects in Poland. I looked for how they interrelated with each other in terms of cross-cultural cooperation. I also watched for those who had questions about the importance of a Jewish cemetery or why TMF was working in a Jewish cemetery.

### **Journals**

Since 2004, several individuals have kept journals while they were working in a Jewish cemetery restoration project in Poland. Since this was pre-existing data, it was relevant. I requested access to and reviewed these journals to determine if they were appropriate sources of data that could assist me in exploring how acts of loving-kindness bridged the gap of Jewish-Christian dialogue. I surveyed a running journal that I kept in my email communications with project participants, orientation materials, and writings that I produced concerning Jewish-Christian interaction since 2004.

### **Other Artifacts**

In January 2015, TMF launched its first official website, which presents a basic overview of the work, along with photographs and video clips focusing primarily on volunteers and their responses to the work of TMF (<http://www.matzevah.org/>). TMF has been using Facebook since January 2011 as a means to engage and communicate with potential participants and donors for its projects (<https://www.facebook.com/matzevah?ref=hl>). Several articles have been published in



magazines and on websites since 2012 in both Polish and English about the work of TMF or me personally. I have also delivered a paper at a conference in India in 2012, speaking about mercy. Additionally, I presented the work of TMF in 2015 at the European Jewish Cemeteries: An Interdisciplinary Conference in Vilnius, Lithuania.

### Data Collection Procedures

Creswell (2013) discusses data collection and clarifies what data collection is; it is the process of “gaining permissions, conducting a good qualitative sampling strategy, developing means for recording information . . . storing the data, and anticipating ethical issues that may arise” (p. 145). Furthermore, he emphasizes that data collection is more than “interviews and observations,” but it encompasses “an ever expanding array of qualitative sources of data” (Creswell, 2013, p. 145). Creswell indicates that data collection is a process of working through several related steps focused upon collecting useful data as a means to answer an evolving research question. I will expound upon the following data collecting activities: (a) locating the site, (b) gaining access, (c) recording information, (d) resolving issues in the field, and (e) data storage (Creswell, 2013, p. 146).

### **Locating Site**

Since I am the CEO and President of The Matzevah Foundation, I have direct access to the Board of Directors. I have had informal board approval to research TMF since my entrance into the Andrews University’s Ph.D. program in the summer of 2011. At our board meeting in March 2015, I informed the board that I was nearing the completion of my dissertation proposal. Consequently, I would soon begin seeking permission to conduct research. I presented my dissertation prospectus and asked them to

consider approving my research request to study the work of TMF. As a part of preparing for the formal internal review board (IRB) process with Andrews University, I secured official permission from the board to research TMF and its participants in the U.S. and Poland (See Letter of Authorization from TMF in Appendix A).

### **Gaining Access**

I have been developing my relationship with the Jewish community of Poland for more than a decade. I have developed a good rapport with many Jewish leaders in Poland, and for the most part, I think that I have greater access to the Jewish community in Poland than I do in the U.S. Since 2008, I have been working to establish and develop relationships within the U.S. Jewish community. I have not been as successful in the U.S. as I have been in Poland; nonetheless, since 2012, the access that I have developed with the Jewish community in the U.S. is significant. I meet quarterly with a rabbi in Atlanta, Georgia, where I live. He is very interested in our work and has proactively connected me with several members of the Jewish community in Atlanta. Through him, I met a journalist who wrote stories about the work of TMF.

In September 2015, I gained IRB approval to conduct my research (See Letter of Authorization from IRB in Appendix B). For my study, I began interviewing selected participants in January and March of 2016 in the U.S. Later that year, I interviewed research participants in July and August of 2016 in conjunction with TMF's Jewish cemetery restoration projects in Poland. I conducted face-to-face interviews with specific interviewees in the U.S. and Poland. I interviewed seven individuals: two rabbis, a Jewish friend, an American Jewish woman of Polish origins, a Polish Christian, and two TMF

board members. These seven individuals have interacted with the TMF organization for several years and me; one has worked with me for more than ten years.

The main sites for conducting my research in Poland were in Warsaw, Markuszów, and Oświęcim. Both focus groups were organized during TMF Jewish cemetery restoration projects. One focus group took place in Markuszów and consisted of two Christians (one person is TMF board member) and two Jews. I conducted the second focus group in Oświęcim, which was comprised of one Christian (a TMF board member) and three mostly non-religious individuals from a European university. I interviewed several individuals in Warsaw, Poland, while all other individual consultations occurred in the U.S., principally in Nashville, Tennessee, and in Atlanta, Georgia.

### **Recording Information**

Based on the 2009 work of Kvale and Brinkmann, Creswell (2013) recommends that researchers “design and use . . . an interview protocol or interview guide” to record information accurately during the interview process (p. 164). The interview guide should have some necessary information about the interview (e.g., date, location, name of interviewer, and interviewee), brief project description, “five to seven open-ended interview questions,” and space for recording participant responses; it should be about four or five pages long (p. 164). The interview protocol allows the researcher to record the responses of the interviewee during the interview and assists the researcher to “organize thoughts” regarding the interview process (p. 168). Furthermore, a researcher may use “an observational protocol to record information” during the process of observation (p. 169). Such a protocol would allow a researcher to record information such as notes about activities and then their reflective responses.

The critical component of recording information is that of what Lofland and Lofland (1995) describe as “logging data” (p. 66), which entails recording notes, write-ups, photographs, video or sound recordings, and documents. With these factors in view, I designed and developed an interview protocol for the interview process. However, to be more thorough and accurate during the interviews, I used small notebooks to make running notes of crucial statements and observations. I recorded all focus groups and individual interviews with a digital voice recorder as a means to record data.

### **Field Issues**

Creswell (2013) recommends that beginning researchers “with limited data collection” experience, as Sampson suggested in 2004, conduct “a pilot project to gain some initial experiences” (Creswell, 2013, p. 171). In the context of this study, I did not carry out such a pilot project because I have experience in conducting qualitative research. In 2014, I conducted my first qualitative research project based on photo-elicitation. I used several of my photographs to generate discussion, capture responses from a focus group, and select individuals. For the independent analysis of the photographs in my first qualitative research project, I used two sets of questions as a means to identify “a set of comprehensive themes” from the photographic data (Creswell, 2013, p. 45).

Nonetheless, the primary issue that I faced in the field was not the lack of experience in conducting research; instead, it was the amount of qualitative data that was generated and collected via individual interviews and focus groups. I interviewed seven individuals, and I conducted two focus group interviews that had four participants each. I captured about twenty hours of interview data from fifteen different voices that had to be

transcribed and analyzed. Initially, I transcribed five of the individual interviews before hiring someone to transcribe the remaining interviews. Consequently, I faced difficulty in working through the amount of data that I collected for this study of TMF.

Moreover, it was challenging for me to make observations because of my role as a participant-observer in the study. Likewise, I was tested at times in remaining independent due to my personal involvement in the work of TMF. However, with my experience as a photojournalist, I was able to step between the roles of observer and participant-observer somewhat easily. Conducting interviews did not present any problems for me; because I learned to do interviews as a photojournalist. For this reason and along with my pastoral training, I have a great deal of experience in asking open-ended questions, listening carefully, and determining primary issues throughout an interview, all of which assisted me in conducting the interviews for this study.

### **Data Storage**

The storage (and protection) of data cannot be emphasized enough in qualitative research. Large amounts of data in the form of notes, documents, recordings, transcripts, etc. were generated and must be stored and protected. Storing and protecting data means, according to Fred Davidson (1996), backing up data, which “is just common sense . . . [and] can save you pain, hassle, and maybe loss of your job” (p. 15). In light of Davidson’s advice, Creswell (2013) concludes that the crucial practice that must be kept in view for qualitative researchers is that of frequently backing up collected data (p. 175). Creswell provides several principles regarding data storage that are pertinent for consideration. Other than backing up data, he recommends that quality materials be used to record the data, researchers develop a “master list” of materials collected, protect the

anonymity of participants, and develop a visual means to locate and identify data (p. 175).

Given these principles, I used a three-step process to record and store audio recordings. For initial recordings, I used my iPhone as a digital recorder. Second, as soon as possible, following the interview, I uploaded the recording from my phone to cloud-based storage using Dropbox.com. Third, I downloaded the audio recordings to an external hard drive on my computer, which was synced to Dropbox.com and continuously backed up. All other types of data (documents, photographs, emails, transcripts, etc.) were treated in the same manner and were locally stored and backed up using Dropbox.com cloud-based storage.

### **Data Analysis**

Creswell (2013) highlights the complexity of textual analysis and the examination of “other forms of data” involved in qualitative inquiries (p. 179). He outlines what is involved with data analysis by comparing it with an interconnected “spiral of activities” (Creswell, 2013, pp. 179; 182-188), which include:

1. Organizing data
2. Conducting a preliminary read-through of the database
3. Coding and organizing themes
4. Representing the data
5. Forming an interpretation of the data

In the case study approach, of particular interest to me in the process of data analysis is the concept of coding: “coding involves aggregating the text or visual data into small categories of information,” then the researcher seeks “evidence for the code from

different databases being used in the study and then assigning a label to the code” (Creswell, 2013, p. 184). What coding means is a narrowing down of the data or refining it to the point that the process removes unnecessary or superfluous data. Initially, when I began my data analysis of the interviews, I lacked an experiential understanding of what coding is. Nevertheless, I quickly learned the basic tenants of coding and employed this method of data analysis to my research inquiry. An analysis of a case study begins with crafting “a detailed description of the case and its setting;” in case study research, Stake calls for four types of interpretation and data analysis (cited in, Creswell, 2013, p. 199):

1. In categorical aggregation, the researcher looks “for a collection of instances from the data.”
2. In direct interpretation, a researcher addresses only “a single instance” and deconstructs and reconstructs the data so that it is more meaningful.
3. Patterns are determined by the researcher in which he or she “looks for correspondence between two or more categories.”
4. Naturalistic generalizations emerge from the data as the researcher analyzes it providing “generalizations that people can learn from the case.”

Interestingly, computer programs are available for qualitative inquiries, which are primarily for data storage and organization, assisting the researcher in locating data more effortlessly. The process is simple in that a researcher “identifies a text segment or image segment, assigns a code label, and develops a printout of the text segments” having the same code label (Creswell, 2013, p. 201). Disadvantages to the software include; (a) learning how to use the program (always a steep learning curve), (b) forming a barrier between the researcher and the data, (c) lack of information regarding the program’s use,

or (d) lack of specific features that a researcher needs. I initially used the QSR NVivo program (<http://www.qsrinternational.com>), which had a steep learning curve, which led me to Dedoose (<https://www.dedoose.com/>). Both programs assist researchers “analyze, manage, shape, and analyze qualitative data” (Creswell, 2013, p. 204). I found Dedoose to be more user-friendly and very helpful as I coded the data.

### **Trustworthiness – Validity Issues**

Regarding the validity of the study, Creswell (2013) addresses validity or validation along with the evaluation of a qualitative research and states that there are many different perspectives of validity and notes the following researchers in the literature: LeCompte and Goetz, Lincoln and Guba, Eisner, Lather, Wolcott, Angen, Whittenmore, Chase, and Mandle, Richardson and St. Pierre, Lincoln, Lynham, and Guba (cited in, Creswell, 2013, pp. 244-245). Furthermore, LeCompte and Goetz (1982) adhere to quantitative equivalents for validation and argue that qualitative inquiry has been criticized by the scientific community for not adhering “to canons of reliability and validation” (p. 31). On the other hand, Creswell emphasizes that Lincoln and Guba establish “trustworthiness” for an inquiry by using naturalistic research equivalents “such as credibility, authenticity, transferability, dependability, and confirmability” as substitutes for “internal validation, external validation, reliability, and objectivity” (cited in, Creswell, 2013, p. 246).

### **Credibility of the Study**

Eisner uses the term credibility for qualitative research instead of validation by seeking “a confluence of evidence” that yields credibility and thereby allows the researcher “to feel confident about observations, interpretations, and conclusions” (cited



in Creswell, 2013, p. 246). Other researchers, such as Wolcott, set aside the concept of validation. He puts forward the notion that validation “neither guides nor informs;” therefore, his purpose is to discover “critical elements” and develop “plausible interpretations for them,” which leads to what he terms “understanding” (cited in Creswell, 2013, pp. 247-248).

### Validation Strategies

Creswell (2013) defines validation in qualitative research as “an attempt to assess the ‘accuracy’ of the findings, as best described by the researcher and the participants” (pp. 249-250). I employed several validation strategies as a means to increase the trustworthiness of my study.

#### **Prolonged Engagement and Persistent Observation**

Creswell (2013) points out the “prolonged engagement and persistent observation” of the researcher in the field as a validation strategy (p. 250). Such field-based considerations allow the qualitative researcher to build trust, learn the culture, and determine the validity of information. I have been involved in Jewish cemetery restoration projects for more than ten years. I have gained a great deal of trust and credibility with both the Polish and Jewish communities in Poland. I speak Polish well (some would say, “fluently”), and I understand the culture impeccably. Both of these attributes allowed me to check for any distortions that may emerge from my involvement or through the participation of the participants.

## **Triangulation**

I used triangulation, which is a practice in which researchers use “multiple and different sources, methods, investigators, and theories to provide corroborating evidence” (Creswell, 2013, p. 251). According to Golafshani (2003), triangulation is a means by which researchers may test “the validity and reliability of research or evaluation of findings” (p. 603). Furthermore, Michael Patton (2015) points out that “triangulation strengthens a study by combining methods”—different types of “methods or data, including using both quantitative and qualitative approaches” (p. 316). In 1998, Barbour challenged this concept because it causes problems related to philosophical assumptions in “terms of theoretical frameworks we bring to bear on our research” (cited in, Golafshani, 2003, p. 603). I corroborated evidence by providing multiple sources of data, two primary methods of data collection, member checking, and auditing, to name a few (some of these concepts will be discussed in the next paragraph).

## **Peer Review or Debriefing**

I also employed “peer review or debriefing,” which ensures “a check of the research.” Regarding conducting a peer review, Pyczak (2013) suggests that qualitative researchers seek an independent analysis by “two or more individuals” (p. 111), while Galvan (2013) advises qualitative researchers to consult “outside experts as a peer review” (p. 58). Moreover, Pyczak advises that researchers should consult independent experts such as an “auditor,” who will be able to provide feedback as a means to “ensure trustworthiness” (pp. 112-113). Creswell (2013) relays that “external audits” provide for an auditor, someone who is independent and “an external consultant,” who will “examine both the process and the product of the account assessing their accuracy” (p. 252). The

use of external consultants or experts ensures more dependable or credible results, which raises the level of confidence in the study. Concerning the development of the themes found in the data, I consulted with an expert, who worked with me as I developed the themes of my study and coded the data. I also discussed theme development and coding with my peers. Both of these approaches served as a means to verify my results.

### **Member Checking**

I used “member checking” and sought participant feedback to safeguard “the credibility of the findings” (Creswell, 2013, p. 252). Likewise, Galvan (2013) indicates that member checking occurs when participants or members of the study check the accuracy of the results; by allowing member checking the researcher, I ensured “that the results reflect the realities as perceived by the participants” (p. 58). Lastly, Creswell (2013) suggests that by providing “rich, thick description,” researchers may confirm that the readers of the study may “make decisions regarding transferability” by providing a detailed description of the “participants or setting under study,” which allows for findings to “be transferred” to other circumstances “because of shared characteristics” (p. 252). In light of this fact, Galvan (2013) suggests that qualitative researchers should provide demographic information regarding the participants, so that they may be seen by the readers, which allows the readers to “make judgments on the adequacy of the sample” (p. 60). Consequently, I included a few descriptive details concerning the demographics of the participants; these details included gender, profession, religious preference or religious identity, and nationality.

## **Disclose Researcher Bias**

Lastly, Creswell (2013) indicates that researchers need to “clarify” their bias and thereby inform the reader of the researcher’s views or positions, biases, or assumptions (p. 251). I take this to mean that every researcher makes judgments regarding what he or she considers being relevant or not; identifying personal bias, as well as the bias of others, is also essential. At times honestly, I struggle with my own bias in what I am doing. I know that I am a follower of Christ, but I am also a public servant who leads a public charity. I must express my personal bias, but I must not allow it to hamper my exploration and research regarding what I have been doing with the global Jewish community of Polish heritage. Most importantly, all researchers, who are interested in cross-cultural dialogue, should consider their own biases.

Expanding somewhat on the point of personal bias in conducting this study, I was the primary research instrument, who analyzed my interactions with the Jewish community as a Christian. I researched my case and my story, with which I have been intimately involved in cooperation with the Jewish community since 2004. In a sense, I have been embedded in this reality, like a journalist embedded in a military operation. My purpose was to question, observe, collect data, develop themes, analyze, and report. My report illuminates the matter of Jewish-Christian interaction at the level of bettering or improving human relations or even more so cultivating Jewish-Christian dialogue with regards to long-standing conflict and mutual distrust. To arrive at such an outcome, I listened to, studied, and sought to understand the Jewish perspective. Hopefully, my research achieved this goal. By so doing, the Jewish community might better understand

that some Christians really do care, that they are not anti-Semitic, and that they simply do not wish by their actions to convert them to Christianity.

With these concepts of validity in mind, I am able to ensure the credibility or trustworthiness of the findings of my study. Consequently, my findings may ascertain whether or not acts of loving-kindness, as seen in the work of TMF, narrow the gap between Jews and Christians, allowing them to engage in meaningful dialogue, possibly leading to forgiveness and reconciliation.

### Generalizability

Generalization, according to Eisner (1991), means a transference of “what has been learned from one situation or task to another” (p. 198). He considers that in life, we generalize what we learn in “skills, images, and ideas” (p. 199) and apply these generalized learnings or generalizations to our actions in similar situations. In research, generalization expects that it would “allow us to make predictions,” or have some idea about future outcomes (p. 200), and ultimately lead to “a good theory that explains why [the generalizations] work” (p. 201). In qualitative case studies, Eisner believes that a researcher can make generalizations; however, he states that “the readers will determine whether the research findings fit the situation in which they work” (p. 204).

Lincoln (2002) considers that postmodern critique has resulted in two outcomes: “all knowledge is partial, incomplete, standpoint-determined, and therefore, suspect in its claims to universality” and that “some knowledges . . . are more equal than others” (p. 8). Lincoln argues that since we “have given up in an assumed universality,” and for it substituted generalizability, “we have gained in richness, texture, flavor, vicarious experience and deeper understanding of lives lived differently from our own” (pp. 8-9).

Furthermore, there are multiple views regarding the “nature of evidence” and what it is; hence, “what we can consider, within any given scientific community, what is valid, reliable, and worthwhile of acceptance” (p. 9). The hallmarks of qualitative studies are twofold: “findings must be grounded in the situation examined, and if possible, comparisons will be created, and findings from one study should be” transferable to or generalized for other studies, which may share similar contexts; nevertheless, “they rarely exhibit a one-to-one correspondence with each other” (p. 12).

Additionally, Eisner (1997) shifts focus away from traditional research methods (statistical analysis, correlation, and experimental designs) to that which he calls the “new frontier,” which arose from discontent or restraints of traditional methodology (p. 2). Furthermore, he points to Aristotle’s three sources of knowledge: theoretical, practical, and productive knowledge and concludes (based on Schwab’s 1969 work) that “knowledge need not be defined solely in the positivistic terms” (p. 2). Eisner believes that contemporary American educational research “displays a remarkable degree of exploratory inclinations,” which is driving change and allowing researchers to develop “new forms” of conducting research that are “better suited for studying the educational worlds” for which they are concerned (p. 3).

Eisner sees a “much greater acceptance” of qualitative research by the broader educational research community, whose members are embracing the method as being “more than a methodological choice,” but as “a reflection of a personality disposition” (p. 7). Eisner hopes that “the field will develop hybrid forms of research” that will include different methods “within the same study” and welcomes “pluralism” within educational research and within the studies themselves (p. 7).

Ultimately as Eisner reasons, the reader is the one who makes generalizations about my research. It is possible that anyone who is interested in the deeper levels of dialogue across any given community may be able to generalize ideas or develop skills about how to approach dialogue from my study.

### **Ethics—IRB Issues**

For my study, the primary ethical issues that I addressed were how I planned to protect or safeguard “the rights of participants,” communicated or disclosed the purpose of study, and thereby provided “informed consent” to the participants, along with “protecting participants from harm, and ensuring confidentiality” (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012, p. 111). In order to protect the identity of the participants in this study, all interview responses are anonymous, and consequently, I used pseudonyms for identifying participants in the findings of this report. For my research, I obtained signed informed consent forms from interview participants, who participated in individual and focus group interviews (See Individual Research Participation Consent Form in Appendix C and Focus Group Research Participation Consent Form in Appendix D).

Additionally, Bloomberg and Volpe recommend that researchers must be mindful during their study of the relationship between themselves and the participants, “which is determined by roles, status, and cultural norms” (p. 112). The latter consideration presented me with a challenging cross-cultural scenario in which I had to be aware of differences in Jewish-Christian religious culture, American-Polish culture, and American-German or European culture as well as language differences.

## Summary

My study was conducted as a qualitative case study of the work of TMF. The case study method of inquiry was best suited for this study because it involves the review of a case—The Matzevah Foundation and its work within the framework of life as it is experienced. I sought to understand how acts of loving-kindness (mercy) influence attitudes and create mutual bridges of understanding as to the underpinning for dialogue. I purposefully selected the participants for this study. The rationale for purposefully choosing specific individuals was to pick “information-rich cases, with the objective of yielding insight and understanding of the phenomenon under investigation” (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012, p. 104).

Consequently, using the criterion of Patton (2002), I selected specific participants who were “information-rich” (p. 237) and had knowledge of and experience with the work of TMF. Principally, I studied the responses of people individually and corporately to open-ended questions about their experience in working with TMF in its educational initiatives and its Jewish cemetery restoration projects in Poland. To gather interview data, I employed two focus groups and interviewed seven individuals as a means to explore the interaction of Jews and Christians within the construct [third space or liminal space] of the work of TMF.

I often find that qualitative studies “bend” reality, meaning that the studies that I have read employ a postmodern hermeneutic and deconstructive approach. Truth seems to be subjective, more so than absolute. There are indeed moral and ethical absolutes; however, they are relatively and subjectively applied by our choice to do so. What I do in my work is bound to and driven by Micah 6:8: *“The Lord God has told us what is right*



*and what he demands: 'See that justice is done, let mercy be your first concern, and humbly obey your God'' (CEV).*

We have a relative choice in applying truth. Truth in my mind is not relative but revealed. Doing what is right is not subjective but demonstrates what is true and real, and that which people long to see in a corrupt world. I have come to realize from what I have been reading in the literature that I am not so much an academician, as I am a practitioner who wants to understand what I have come to be doing intuitively through TMF. In my study, I sought to determine what principles lie at the foundation of what I am doing. Does research support these principles, and how might they be transferable to other contexts?

## CHAPTER 4

### REACTION OF JEWS AND CHRISTIANS TO WORK OF TMF

#### **Introduction**

In Markuszów, a small Polish village, bisecting a stretch of road once heavily traveled between Warsaw and Lublin, a little boy peers over the fence in his backyard. He is about six-years-old. As with any young child, Piotr is curious about what is going on behind his home in a small patch of woods. The woods conceal a secret from the past, a silent witness to the fact that at one time, this village was the home to a large and vibrant community of Jews. These Jews were neighbors who lived among and possibly next door to this little boy's family. During WWII, Nazi Germany erased the Jewish community from this village, executing some of its Jewish residents and transporting others to places like Treblinka, Sobibor, Belżec, Majdanek, and possibly even Auschwitz—all factories of death.

Unquestionably, the Nazis also attempted to eliminate any traces of Jewish presence by desecrating the Jewish cemetery behind this young boy's home. The Nazis enacted this so-called cultural genocide in this sacred space by intentionally shattering and fragmenting some matzevot [headstones], while gathering and transporting other matzevot away so that they might be used for roads, sidewalks, curbing, and building material. This little boy is unaware of such a history. He merely knows that there is a

group of people working behind his home in a place that he has undoubtedly explored, but its significance is mysterious to him.

Piotr frames the story and provides the context of this study. The people working beyond the rear of his home are volunteers working with The Matzevah Foundation (TMF) to clear and clean this forgotten Jewish cemetery and rededicate it to the memory of its former Jewish community, as seen in Photograph 6. I am the founder and president (CEO) of TMF, and as such, I actively participate in nearly every Jewish cemetery project that our organization embraces in Poland. My role in this study is that of a participant-observer, meaning that I actively moved between participating in the work, while observing and documenting the experiences, including my own, and of those, who partook in the endeavors of TMF. My study examines the interaction of people, who are volunteers with, or who are associated with TMF. These volunteers include Jewish descendants, nonreligious students, Poles, Europeans, Americans, religious and nonreligious Jews, non-Jews, and Christians, who are working with each other within the liminal space of the Jewish cemetery. Six major themes have emerged from the interviews that I conducted for my case study of the work of TMF. These major themes are relationships, reconciliation, remembering, restoration, caring, and dialogue.

Regarding my findings, I have divided the themes into two parts and grouped them according to my two research questions as a means to understand how those involved and those affected by the work of TMF have developed in their interaction with one another. The first grouping of findings will be presented in Chapter 4, Reaction of Jews and Christians to Work of TMF. In this chapter, I will answer my first research question: How have Jews and Christians responded to the work of The Matzevah



*Photograph 6. A Matzevah Commemorates a Jewish Cemetery in Poland*

A TMF volunteer drags limbs and branches to a shredder for composting in a Jewish cemetery in Poland in the summer of 2016. © Copyright 2016-2019 by Steven D. Reece.

Foundation? Chapter 4 will contemplate how people have reacted to the work by means of developing relationships, loving acts (caring), reconciliation, remembering, and restoration.

### **Relationships**

A relationship is an interaction or an exchange between people or organizations. It characterizes in what manner people or organizations relate to each other as they interact. The relationships that TMF has with people are concerned primarily with interpersonal associations, but at times these relations may be inter-organizational. Relationships can be based on friendship, could be collegial, or could be project-based or work-related

exchanges. Most frequently, the relational bonds encountered in this case study may be viewed through friendship and trust. Many people said that TMF builds relational bridges and crosses cultural, linguistic, and religious barriers to establish relationships within the Polish and Jewish communities of Poland and elsewhere. People used these terms, or phrases to characterize what I do in my work, or what TMF does in its work: building bridges, building relationships, or bridging culture.

### Building Relationships

As a Christian leader, I have realized that I must lead TMF to be proactive and seek to close the abyss that has existed between Jew and Christian for centuries. Flannery (1997) argues that Christians need to “adopt the Jewish agenda” and take a step toward reconciliation (p. 3). In the Jewish statements of *Dabru Emet* (Hebrew, to speak truth), Frymer-Kensky et al. (2000) assert, “A new relationship between Jews and Christians will not weaken Jewish practice” (Frymer-Kensky et al., 2000, para. 7). If no relationship exists in the midst of Jews and Christians, then taking steps toward reconciliation with the Jewish community means inherently developing a process of building relationships with the Jewish community. Within the construct of TMF, we have individually and corporately reached out to the Jewish community, and as one board member stated, we are “trying to extend an olive branch to the Jewish people.”

Building relationships, therefore, is an intentional, interpersonal, and creative process that pursues establishing bonds and developing trust over time. It requires patience, persistence, and diplomacy. One rabbi reflects this understanding and concludes, “As with any relationship . . . you build trust over time, and because we have been persistent in keeping everything [in our relationship] going, I think that we have

developed a sense of trust and friendship.” Furthermore, he reasons, “You build a relationship with someone,” because “you care about them, who they are and what they’re doing.” Since relationships are dynamic exchanges among people, they grow and develop over time.

Consequently, in building relationships, people may change how they understand and view each other over time in the context of their interaction. Miriam, a Jewish woman, remarkably reflects this understanding and states,

I’ve obviously grown as a person as a result of knowing you, and to me, that’s part of friendships. You didn’t ask me outright, but the relationship asked me to open my ears differently, open my mind, open my way of seeing things.

The building of relationships plays a significant role in and underpins the work of TMF. One board member explained that TMF “is building relationships with both Christian and Jewish advocates locally in the U.S. and internationally both in Poland and in Israel.” Rabbi Zimmer contends that the work of TMF is predicated by “having people forming these relationships to do this holy sacred work of restoring [Jewish] cemeteries [in Poland] that nobody else is paying attention to.”

Gabriel, a Polish Jew, described the work of TMF in this way,

Besides the work, the practical part that the Foundation Matzevah [TMF] is doing is building a relationship with a certain environment that is not the natural environment of the people that established this foundation. And we called that before bridge building. And that is what it is for me. [Building relationships] is what it’s all about.

Gabriel understands from his viewpoint most people, who are associated with the work of TMF are non-Jews; therefore, they are not from his natural, Polish-Jewish community. He places the context of the work of TMF within “the certain environment,” i.e., within the particular cultural context for TMF that is foreign to its own. TMF consists of people, who are primarily American Baptist Christians; however, it does have

a Polish Baptist Christian serving on its board. Since TMF is presently comprised of non-Jews, and mainly American Christians, the organization itself is alien or foreign to Jewish life in Poland.

Conversely, Szymon interprets our interaction, our relationship in the context of memory—with what we are dealing, when we work with each other in projects related to Jewish cemeteries or commemorating mass graves. He asserts, “We are dealing with, with something that was forgotten for a long time.” He adds that our relationship has led us to remember people who “died because they were who they were. They were just Jews. It’s not just about being Jews; it’s about being different. They were different.” Going one step further, he concludes,

And I think these projects are taking us to a real level where we can understand our friendship too. [Developing friendship] is the real thing. That’s what I think now . . . . But now I see that we are actually [working] with projects that also can express our relationship, our dialog, saving memory—preserving memory, marking graves, and working together.

Therefore, Szymon thinks that our relationship has grown over time and is now “actually getting to the next level.” The time, he considers, “that we have spent together, was worth, was worth really spending.” In our relationship, he states, “We are getting into more complicated things, more difficult things—things that want to be forgotten,” such as commemorating mass graves, where “we don’t even know, who was really [doing the] killing there.” For him, the reasons that it is “much easier to accept a Jewish cemetery than [it is to] accept the mass grave” somewhere in a forgotten field or forest. He concludes, “So, our relationship, our dialog, is growing, is evolving. And I’m very happy about it. I’m glad we can experience that together.” By remembering those who are forgotten, Szymon and I are changed, and that change leads to action and a deeper understanding of ourselves, others, and G-d.

## Bridge Building

Szymon understands the work of TMF as that of bridge-building; it is crossing an unseen barrier, a border, a gap, or a breach that exists between non-Jews and Jews, or between Christians and Jews. Spanning this chasm allows us to enter a relationship with one another and become friends. He sees our work in Jewish cemeteries as “bridge building,” or developing “inter-religious relation[ships] . . . Something that we can build together, something [with which] we can inspire each other. That is for me the true purpose of this Foundation [TMF]”. Whenever he considers TMF and its work, he thinks of it as “building a friendship between different people, [which was] something that throughout history often wasn’t possible. And that is the sweetest thing about this foundation [TMF], I believe.” From Szymon, we learn that building friendships is a recursive process of learning in which both sides learn about each other, discover their identities, and determine what “can be shared.” He concludes,

[You] are trying to understand Jews, their religion, their culture, their problems, practical problems with cemeteries, or things related to cemeteries. I think it’s about understanding each other. And finding sort of you know, some elements that we can share.

Ultimately, these shared elements become the underpinning for further cooperation and dialogue, which are both important considerations. Laying the groundwork for such a relationship is mutually achieved; therefore, whatever emerges is shared. Szymon states that it is “equally yours and mine . . . . It’s ours; we built it. So it’s beyond Jewish, or Baptist, or whatever, we have built a foundation,” and I would add that this foundation is a bridge. It “connects” us. We have a relationship with each other.

Building bridges and connecting people leads to three primary outcomes: practical work, collaboration, and friendship.



## Practical Work

Building a bridge to the Jewish community establishes connections, but it also enables practical work to be done. For example, in a recent collaborative Jewish cemetery project, we encountered an ethical dilemma regarding a buried matzevah that we discovered while digging and installing a pathway in a particular Jewish cemetery as pictured in Photograph 7.



*Photograph 7. A Buried Matzevah, Uncovering the Past*

A buried matzevah is discovered just below the surface of the ground in the course of installing a new pathway in a Jewish cemetery in Poland in the summer of 2016. © Copyright 2016-2019 by Steven D. Reece.

Without the relationship that I have established with the Polish-Jewish community or the work that TMF has done in building bridges, Dawn, a student-leader, realized and

stated, “We would have to take a step back and stop and then find our own connections, and then, what do we do from there?” Since I have been working with the Polish-Jewish community in cemetery restoration projects, since 2005, I have developed relationships and connections within the Jewish community, which readily enables us to reach out for assistance. After consulting with several Jewish leaders, we learned what we would be able to do and then proceeded in recovering the matzevah.

Regarding the outcome of this situation Dawn stated,

That was brilliant because that was step by step, then we know exactly what to do, but [you] have built that bridge already, and it was because you could talk to them, you speak Polish, that is amazing. So, you could understand everything. But you had already made that bridge and understand the Polish culture, and for them to respect you back. That’s a very good thing. I mean, it must have been hard to do, but it’s really good that it has been done.

Dawn’s comments about building the bridge to the Jewish community of Poland points to another outcome—the ability of TMF to share its expertise with others collaboratively through networking and partnering with other people, groups, and institutions involved in Jewish heritage preservation.

### **Collaboration**

Jewish views of Christians are changing. The Center for Jewish–Christian Understanding and Cooperation (2015) or CJCUC released an orthodox rabbinical statement on Christianity expressing that “Jews and Christians must work together as partners to address the moral challenges of our era” (para. 1). Moreover, TMF may link its work of restoration and reconciliation with members of the Jewish community, who affirm “the ongoing constructive validity of Christianity as [their] partner in world redemption” with the caveat that this partnership will not “be exploited for missionary purposes” (para. 4).

Typically, Christians view redemption as being found in Christ Jesus, while in Judaism, we learn that Jews do not recognize “the messianic claims of Jesus” (Anderson, 2014, p. 68). Nonetheless, these two viewpoints are not mutually exclusive. We may find common ground in that the most basic understanding of redemption, G-d acts to redeem His creation. For Jews, the concept of restoration (a form of redemption) is known as *Tikkun Olam*—restoring, restorative works, healing, which means in Hebrew “repair of the world” (Sucharov, 2011, p. 172).

In 2004, the Chief Rabbinate of Israel’s Bilateral Commission with the Roman Catholic Church stated, “[Jews and Christians] are no longer enemies, but unequivocal partners in articulating the essential moral values for the survival and welfare of humanity” (cited in, The Center for Jewish–Christian Understanding and Cooperation, 2015, para. 4). For this reason, the CJCUC asserts that Jews and Christians cannot “achieve G-d’s mission in this world alone” (para. 4).

In its most straightforward sense, collaboration means working with others to achieve an outcome. I learned that the work, which G-d has led me to do, couldn’t be done alone. I must partner or collaborate with others to address the aftermath of the Shoah. When I began restoring Jewish cemeteries in 2005, I immediately began to engage the Jewish community, volunteers not only from Baptist churches in both Poland and the U.S. but from the local Catholic community, as well. Eventually, I worked in partnership with a small group of Baptist Christians, whom I led in Jewish cemetery restoration projects, to establish TMF in 2010. Since that time, we have developed formal partnerships and collaborations with Polish-Jewish, European, and American institutions,

as well as with universities in Europe and with one Baptist church. Also, TMF seeks to partner with local governments and communities in Poland.

Subsequently, the work that TMF does leads to interdisciplinary cooperation, or collaboration, which as Linda stated, “That is part of the thing with the partnering . . . Well, again, the whole thing is about bringing people together, isn’t it?” Linda made this statement in the course of a focus group interview conducted in conjunction with a joint project involving her university, a Polish-Jewish foundation, and TMF. Explaining the project further she added,

I think that is the key strength of all of [the cooperation in this project] is you get people in a place, who may initially seem quite different and diverse, but actually, I think underneath it all pretty much everybody in the project has got the same goal underneath. So, if you can find commonality in something, you can kind of build from there [and] engage with that diversity.

A TMF board member, Kathy, affirms this notion stating, “I think the partnerships are the coolest thing in bringing all the different disciplines together.” It exposes people to ideas and viewpoints to which they “might not otherwise ever have had any exposure. It elevates us all and makes us all better. It gives us all more to go out and share.”

From an article that appeared in the Jewish media, Aleksander Schwarz, a Polish Jew, echoed what I do in engaging diversity. He stated, “Steven does much more than taking care of Jewish cemeteries” (Jaben-Eilon, 2015, p. 32), and expanding further he says,

I believe the true work that Steven does is building an understanding and mutual respect between different traditions. That kind of work is exceptional. It gives great results for now and the future. Jewish cemeteries should be maintained not only by physical work, but also, they have to be understood as far as the Jewish law and tradition. This goal can be achieved by educational projects that Steven carries out.

Because I have led TMF and myself to build this kind of relationship with the Polish-Jewish community, it has yielded dividends that are beneficial for others.

Subsequently, Linda recognizes that the work that we have done collaboratively would have looked entirely different if neither of us had a relationship with the Jewish community of Poland. She considers the fact that if I did not have “the links” with the Jewish community and institutions already established then,

We couldn't come in and say, well, we think this is the right thing to do. We're going to go and do it. And not taking any notice whatsoever of any of that. But because you have already built those relationships here, and we have people involved who can offer that first-hand opinion, you know, then I think that means that it is not really about the other, because we are all working together. And I think that is so important on so many levels for a project, which is about justice and diversity.

Collaboration requires leadership and the ability to balance the needs of each group, respectively, engaged in a particular project. Samuel, a Jewish descendant, with whom TMF has been collaborating for several years, reflects this understanding in our cooperative work in Oświęcim and Markuszów. In Oświęcim, he says that he “was a worker bee.” Nevertheless, in Markuszów, he took on more responsibility as a player-coach, so to speak. He explains,

I was a worker bee. But not always a worker bee, because I was either called aside to do some administrative responsibility, task, or help the challenge of being an administrative role. [I had] to think of the bigger picture: how is my group doing, how is our group doing. So, they were [involved] in somewhat different kinds of things.

In both of these instances, he states, “I quickly felt, and I attribute this to your leadership, Steven, to the people who work with you in The Matzevah Foundation, [an] ethos in both cases.” Subsequently, he states,

I very quickly felt part of a thing of beauty. Beauty is truly rare in this world. And human beauty, which is people giving to each other, and in this case, also

giving to people [the dead], who can't return anything, is exceptionally rare. And, I felt that incredibly strongly in both circumstances.

Collaboration means building something together, which is, as Samuel terms it, “a thing of beauty.” It also means partners closely working with each other over time, which may lead in due course to friendship.

## **Friendship**

Building a relationship takes time, and it can lead to friendship. Some board members of TMF have been working in Poland for at least ten years in restoring Jewish cemeteries. Allen, a Christian and a TMF board member, expressed that by being in Poland and working with the Jewish community all these years, it has been his effort to “extend a hand of friendship” and find “common ground” within the Jewish community—among those, with whom he has worked. He recalled in his efforts to build a relationship with one particular Jewish man. In his efforts, he says, “[I was] not trying to convert him,” or “trying to patronize him.” To me, it was “me, just as a man and him, as a man, having a friendship, even though we speak different languages, even though we have different backgrounds, we can still find common ground.” In other words, over the years, Allen views his efforts with this particular Jewish man as his purpose to build a relationship, possibly a friendship with this man.

Szymon and I have worked with each other in Jewish cemeteries and mass grave commemorations for many years. Szymon keenly understands our differences and how we “found stuff” that brought us together; nevertheless, our friendship “took time” to build. Initially, our relationship was transactional—we were working together in a Jewish cemetery. Szymon describes how our relationship began and transformed as we worked with each other:

In the beginning, I was like, you know, ok, there is a Baptist group that is cleaning a cemetery. Let's go; let's tell them about the Jewish law and all that. Ok, we have these groups, but it's not like that. Because it's been going on for years, and you are doing really heavy-duty work. You are not picking up garbage. You do that, but it's just a little part. So over the years, I started understanding that someone comes to help, sort of like a friend comes to help you. He doesn't care if you are black or white, or Jew, or not Jew. Who cares? It is help.

In building a relationship, caring for the other person and doing something to help them in their particular situation is significant. From our interaction, Szymon understood this aspect of caring and doing for the other person, as our relationship developed.

Nevertheless, the question of why persisted in his mind: Why would non-Jews, Christians, want to help Jews take care of Jewish cemeteries in Poland? Szymon explains,

So for me, it was difficult to understand why. But over the years, I did understand. I mean, I did grasp it. I think it's about also sharing this connection with history. And I know that for you as [a] Baptist, it's important to get, . . . [to] the bottom of things, [like] the Old Testament, the Jewish law, who are Jews, and the whole Polish problem, the war problem, [and] the cemetery problem. And, it took a while to understand why, sort of, 'these people,' not us, not Jews, but 'others' want to help. But as we spoke about it, it's not a Jewish thing, and it's not a Baptist thing. I think we sort of fit, you know?

In time, the personal differences between Szymon and I became less important as our relationship developed—Baptist Christians and Jews are different to be sure; nonetheless, in our friendship, according to Szymon, “all these details are not important anymore.” Our relationship is more than a transaction, i.e., work to be done in caring for Jewish cemeteries, or mass graves in Poland. Szymon thinks that our work is work that “is based on friendship.” More so, he states, “Without friendship, without so many years of work[ing] together, it wouldn't work out. And that is something worth, I think, remembering.”

Szymon also reasons that those people, who are involved in our work, must not focus on the differences and shortcomings existing in their midst. Instead, he indicates

that they should “just go into it [the work], trust [each other], do the work, [and] help others, I think it’s very inspiring; it should be inspiring for everyone. And that’s the most important part.” The inspiration to which he refers is vitally important to what we do together. Without it, he concludes that “there wouldn’t be other qualities in it [the work] like friendship, like a mutual understanding, or even sharing jokes. So, friendship is a huge factor here. I think it’s very important. Actually, I think it’s the most important.”

Subsequently, Szymon considers friendship as “sort of the glue that puts it together.” In other words, he sees friendship as the glue that binds our work together. “Otherwise,” he states, “we would have many elements that are not connected. Friendship connects that [us and what we do in our work].” He adds, “I think you are my friend, a true friend. And it’s not about cemeteries; it’s not about Judaism, just a friend. [And] . . . I feel that you are reaching where not many want to reach.”

He reasons further that what we do in our cemetery and commemoration projects cannot be repeated with anyone else because “you have to build the bridge, the friendship. And we have done that.” He concludes:

So I am not sure if you can create one formula and tell others, you know, you build up the friendship and then these projects work. For some people, it wouldn’t be understandable. What friendship, we are supposed to go there, clean up the cemetery? We don’t need friendships here. Yes, you do, because we are different. And we’re similar at the same time, like for instance, humor, sensitivity, [working] together [in] projects, talking about also personal stuff. We sit in the evening, [and] we sometimes talk about our projects, but we talk about us—about our [lives], environments, [and] differences. All of this creates that kind of good and comfortable environment between people that are different.

Essentially, Szymon is describing the process of bridging cultural differences that exist in the midst of those working together in the work of TMF.



## Bridging Culture

Since TMF is recognized as “bridge builders” in its work, it is bridging, linking, or closing the gap between people, who are inherently different from each other. We are connecting Jews and Christians, Poles and Jews, and others who are dealing with the aftermath of the Shoah and its reality today. Ashley, a Christian, and a TMF board member reflected,

[We are to] be a bridge to the Polish and Jewish communities. I have definitely seen that [being a bridge] play out in the last few years of our work that kind of bridge-building between the Polish Communities and Jewish Communities actually in Poland.

Rabbi Baum stated it this way, “The Matzevah [Foundation] serves as a bridge” and is “working hard,” connecting and building bonds between people. What TMF does, he continues, “is a very visceral kind of communication. You don’t need to speak the same language, not so much. It breaks through in ways [to the] other.” From Rabbi Baum’s perspective, TMF can break down barriers through working together, and that TMF can be in the field, build a presence, and build connections with the local Polish community.

A Polish-Christian, Tomek, considers his involvement in the undertaking of TMF. He appreciates that we work “across borders” and have “empathy to [the] Jewish community,” as we assist them with their cemeteries in Poland. Accordingly, he states,

The main lesson that I got is that for most, we have to learn [about] the community, the group that we are trying to help. And we have to know what is needed there and what may be our involvement [role or part] in that work.

Additionally, Tomek thinks that to help,

We have to know how we can do that [care for a Jewish cemetery] without damaging the relationships even further. So, that is the first main lesson that I got. How to start, even thinking about helping someone is not what I want to do. It is something that is required to do—what the person, or the group that you are trying to help [requires] of you, or sees as the necessity or need.

To bridge culture, TMF must become a student of Jewish culture and Judaism, so that we may learn what is relevant or valuable to the Jewish community as we work with them to care for and restore Jewish cemeteries in Poland.

### **Cross-cultural Understanding**

Jan Jaben-Eilon (2015), a Jewish journalist, once wrote an article about me in which she quoted me saying,

I stand as a hybrid between Jews and Christians, but I'm neither one . . . I've become a third culture. For the person in the middle, I have to show grace to both sides. But that's what bridge builders do (p. 33).

To build bridges, it is imperative, for those that I lead as well as myself, to understand Jewish culture and what a Jewish cemetery means to the Jewish people.

Consequently, it is indispensable to understand in what way one may work in a Jewish cemetery, according to the *Halakhah* (Jewish Law). I practically learned *Halachic* concepts and traditions by translating from Polish to English for Leszek (a member of the RCC) during seminars or training sessions for volunteers. I invited him to teach our American and Polish Baptists, Catholic Poles, and other volunteers about the *Halakhah*, Jewish burial practices, and why it was essential to work in Jewish cemeteries. Everything that I learned about Jewish cemeteries, the *Halakhah*, Jewish traditions, etc., I learned from him practically, as I wrestled with terminology and concepts in translating from Polish to English. I applied this knowledge to my practice.

During a research and restoration project, Dawn, a student-leader, and volunteer made this observation about the work of TMF:

The thing that I have learned about the foundation [TMF], . . . is the attention to detail. [Regarding] not only the ways that the cemetery is restored (for example, here in Oświęcim) but also the attention to detail in terms of understanding what

the Jewish culture and what Jewish cemeteries mean to Jewish people. And, therefore, how restoration methodologies can be adapted to meet those needs.

By not being Jewish she deliberates, “It would be very easy [for someone] to come in, either from a Christian perspective or any other perspective . . . and simply project your opinion about what should happen onto a restoration project.” Because TMF has developed and “built incredible relationships with, in particular with the Jewish community here in Poland and the rabbis, with [Polish Jews],” she thinks, “[It] shows the importance of not only empathy in research and empathy in practice but also the importance of taking the time to build those relationships before you actually come in and do the research.”

Moreover, Dawn reasons, because TMF has “already built” relationships in Poland with the Jewish community, we can consult with them and obtain their opinion when necessary. “I think,” she continues, “that means that it is not really about the other because we are all working together.”

### **Bridging Differences and Removing Barriers**

Bridging culture may be viewed in two dimensions. First, TMF bridges differences and engages people of differing worldview perspectives, religious beliefs, and cultural backgrounds in its work in caring for and restoring Jewish cemeteries in Poland, as depicted in Photograph 8. As an organization, we are aware that these differences can separate or create a gap between people from other cultures and backgrounds and us. Nonetheless, Tomek, a long-term Polish-Christian volunteer, realizes that these differences separated us “from the beginning” in the projects of TMF. He explains, additionally recalling a conversation that he and several board members had with Szymon



*Photograph 8. A Matzevah Bridging Differences*

A group of Jewish and Polish high school students get to know one another during their work in a Jewish cemetery restoration project in Poland in the fall of 2006. © Copyright 2006-2019 by Steven D. Reece.

one evening. He acknowledges that with Szymon our mutual work in Jewish cemetery restoration “brought us together first of all” and “from our conversation” with him,

I know that he [Szymon] also wants for the Jewish community to have better relationships with Poles, which is one of the main points that we are trying to accomplish. And be a mediator there [in the relationship with Poles and Jews].

Furthermore, Tomek believes that our conversation with Szymon was “ basically just connecting [with him] on the human level. [We discussed] common interests and values, music, culture, film, or those things, which made it like [a] more personal relationship.” He thinks that the conversation reflected personal involvement and interaction in the context of a group of people working together on the same project.

Thus, from this encounter, we see that there is intimacy, a relational exchange between people regarding what it means to be human among those who participate in the work of TMF. Even though people are different, Jewish cemetery restoration projects bring people together; they connect people, establishing bonds, or building a relationship between them. Each project, therefore, becomes a touchpoint, creating a connection between people, so that they may interact and get to know one another. Tomek concludes,

So it [TMF projects] builds trust in a way, and something, well, it shows it is not [a] fluke, but something that one wants to do for a week, two weeks, or so, and then have [the work] done. But [it is] something one wants to continue working on.

Second, we also see that TMF can break down barriers by working together with other people from various backgrounds, and it can be in the field, build a presence, build connections with the local community. To some degree, TMF represents the Jewish community to those with whom it is interacting and within a given project. Rabbi Baum, a rabbi, working in Poland, believes that TMF acts as a representative of, but does not entirely represent the Jewish community because if it did, “it wouldn’t be able to do as much.” Instead, he concludes, TMF at best, “might represent the goodwill of the Jewish community;” nevertheless, he feels that “its ability to do what it does specifically, is because it is seen as not a [part of the] Jewish community.” In processing the role and interaction of TMF with the Jewish community, he reflects,

On the one hand, certainly it’s representing us—it represents the Jewish community in that it is pursuing our goals—in agreement with us. That everything is understood, there is very good communication, and it’s the same goals. On the other hand, because it isn’t Jewish, I think it seems that it is something different for the people [local Poles] there.

In the end, what TMF does for both the Jewish and Polish communities, Rabbi Baum states, is to create “more of a blank slate,” which allows “more of projection from each side. For the Jews, we can present our desires on what you are doing, what we want [to be] done, and they can also do the same.

### **Loving Acts (Caring)**

Loving acts are actions that flow out of love or concern for others. These acts of love are rooted in compassion or concern for others. Caring mirrors such concern and carries the meaning of looking after something that is important. Jews and Christians may come to terms with the past trauma brought about by long-term anti-Semitism and the Shoah through dealing with such evil today by means of “loving acts.” Johnson (2012) considers that “Scott Peck is not alone in arguing that loving acts can overcome evil” (p. 127). For the people, who are involved with the work of TMF in caring for and restoring Jewish cemeteries in Poland, motivation is critically important. Frequently, people used words, such as love, care, or concern for others, empathy, honor, kindness, or loving-kindness, to express their motivation. Some people saw their involvement in the work of TMF, as “the right thing to do.” Recalling once more what Herman (2015) instructs us about remembering, or “doing the right thing,” it should lead to a compassionate response. Academically, we understand this compassionate response as humane orientation.

Humane orientation “is the degree to which individuals in organizations or societies encourage and reward individuals for being fair, altruistic, friendly, generous, caring, and kind to others” (Javidan & Dastmalchian, 2009). Kabaskal and Bodur (2004) explain further that “this dimension is manifested in the way people treat one another and

in the social programs institutionalized within each society” (p. 569). Humane orientation is expressed differently across cultures, along a continuum from high to low humane orientation in societies and institutions. Descriptions of humane behavior are not new but have existed since antiquity and “ideas and values” related to this dimension may be found among “classic Greek philosophers” and “in the teachings of many of the major religions of the world” (Kabaskal & Bodur, 2004, p. 565). The principal idea embedded in the classical Greek understanding concerning this human attribute is reciprocal, as well as mutual love found in friendship. Humans are interrelated and connected to each other; therefore, love or concern for others is a fundamental expression of humanity. Simply stated, humane orientation is concerned with the welfare of humankind.

#### Justice: Concern for Community

Concern for others, caring for and doing the right thing, or pursuing justice flows from a sense of community. When people care for others around them in their midst or demonstrate compassion toward the society in which they live, they express the ethical ideas of altruism and communitarianism. Altruism is caring for other people and is akin to love of neighbor. Johnson (2012) emphasizes such concern for others as “the ultimate ethical standard” (p. 170). We can see that altruism closely mirrors kindness or compassion for others, and it may be closely linked to the concept of loving-kindness, or mercy as seen in Micah 6:8. Communitarianism, or caring for the community, is seen when members of the community “shoulder their responsibility and seek the common good” by sharing a concern for “their fellow citizens” (Johnson, 2012, p. 164). Members of the community must, in turn, care, show concern for, or “have significant obligations to their fellow citizens” (Johnson, 2012, p. 164). Communitarianism is somewhat

controversial because it looks at society—what is best for the community and does not solely consider what is best for the needs of the individual.

Justice is communal and expresses itself in the community in the way people interact with each other. Justice is a value, but it is also behavior. Subsequently, justice echoes a sense of morality and reflects the categorical imperative of Kant (ca. 1785), which proposes doing what is right—no matter what. Some people disagree with the universal nature of Kant’s argument because, according to Johnson (2012), Kant asserts that “there are universal principles that should be followed in every situation” (p. 160).

Linda, a university professor, intersects with Kant’s ethical theory declaring from her scientific point of view, her involvement with the work of TMF arises from “a sense of doing what is right, and a sense of morality . . . it is a form of justice.” As a science professor, when she speaks of justice and morality, some people “might misinterpret” her moral concerns. She counters such thinking and argues, “I was a person before I was a scientist, so I can’t kind of push the professional stuff to one side, [concerning] what informs my professional practice because I want to do the right thing.”

Also, Linda wonders, “I can’t imagine the situation where I would be in the situation like people are, who have lost family members in the Holocaust, you know.” “For me,” she continues, “It’s about that application [of morality] to what I do to make sure that people can have; hopefully, some kind of answer to that” [what happened during the Shoah]. Furthermore, she reasons that TMF pursues justice, in order “to give people a little bit of hope in a desperate situation.” Since TMF restores Jewish cemeteries for the Jewish community of Poland and beyond, she adds,

You offer them the ability to honor the house of the living in the way that they would want to. So, I think it, as I was saying, not a legal kind of justice, or anything, not



justice in that sense, but a kind of doing what is right for a community, who is wronged.

She accentuates the fact that since TMF and her university are non-Jewish institutions, we are focusing our work—what we do upon “a community other than our own, as well.”

From a Jewish point of view, Rabbi Zimmer considers the implications of justice and concern for others. He states, “You do [justice] because it’s the right thing to do; it needs to be done. It doesn’t matter how you feel. It’s *zedakah*—the work of righteous giving and doing. It has nothing to do with what you feel.” He highlights the difference in Western and Jewish understanding of doing what is right. “The Latin word for charity,” he says, “is about feeling good.” *Caritas* carries the meaning of the Christian love of humankind or charity, and generally, we may conclude that doing charitable acts is more centered on personal feelings; even so, the Jewish understanding is different.

The Torah teaches us that justice is focused upon our actions toward others. According to Rabbi Joseph Telushkin (2001), the Hebrew word *zedakah* is translated as justice or righteousness, and “it is usually translated, somewhat inaccurately as charity” (p. 573). He elaborates further by stating that acting justly “is perhaps the most important obligation Judaism imposes on the Jew” (p. 573). The Torah admonishes us in Deuteronomy 16:20 to pursue justice: “Justice (*zedek*), justice you shall pursue.” Later we learn from the Talmud: “*Zedakah* is equal to all the other commandments combined (Bava Bathra 9b)” (cited in, Telushkin, 2001, p. 573). The giving of *zedakah* is viewed in Judaism as acting justly. Rabbi Zimmer emphasizes, “*Zedakah* is about obligation. If there is a need in the world, you deal with it. It doesn’t matter how it makes you feel.”

## Social Obligation

According to Rabbi Zimmer, justice is inherently linked with being obligated “to the community in which you live. So, here, the community could be local. It could be the state. It could be national. It could be international.”

Consequently, doing justice, acting justly, or doing what is right also has a “horizontal dimension” among humanity, as Volf (2000) maintains, which correspondingly gives it a social dimension and an expression of faith. Waldron Scott (1980) indicates this G-d “is concerned about social justice, not mere private morality” (p. 49). Glasser and McGavran (1983) echo this point of view and conclude that G-d “is strongly moved by the cries of the oppressed, particularly when His people collectively make no effort to relieve their anguish” (p. 35). Jews and Christians are not to be only morally upright people. They are to be compassionate, showing concern for their neighbors—the people living around them, those people, who are oppressed by injustice. Rabbi Zimmer affirms that in mutually pursuing justice, “we can come together for an action that expresses both of our faiths.” Applying this understanding further, he concludes, “And that action is to repair these cemeteries that are falling apart that are neglected and to do God’s work together in bringing a sense of justice and wholeness and peace to our world.”

For Rabbi Baum, this social dimension of justice means making something right, or more so, returning balance, “where so much has been taken out of balance.” Restoring this balance, it seems to him to be “very important for the people, who live there now” in these Polish communities, where so many Jews once lived. Due to the injustice of the Shoah, very few, if any, Jews remain in these places. He reasons that “the imbalance in

terms of respect for the dead [in Jewish cemeteries], in terms of the respect for their memory, creates other imbalances today, here and now.”

Furthermore, Rabbi Baum contemplates, “It seems a bit counter-intuitive, but by paying respect [to the dead], and protecting those, who can’t be protected,” i.e., doing justice, “we pay respect, and we protect other segments [of society] as well.” In describing the outcomes of such projects, he thinks,

[They are] beyond the theoretical or psycho-spiritual ways; [they] can change things by getting people involved in dealing with memory, dealing with protecting cemeteries. It creates an awareness of history for many of these people, for many of us, [and] gives a much greater depth to our understanding of who we are.

Finally, he affirms that it “allows us [those involved] to look at ourselves differently and to open ourselves to a much wider variety of perspectives and motivations.”

### The Need

The legacy of caring for more than a thousand Jewish cemeteries in Poland is an overwhelming need because nearly one generation of Jewish descendants was eradicated during the Shoah. These Jewish descendants would be caring for their ancestral cemeteries today, as they have from generation to generation. Following WWII, those Jews who survived in Poland—roughly 240,000 of them, many chose to emigrate, while others attempted to rebuild their devastated communities. Nonetheless, in 1968, the communist government of Poland forced the Jewish community to emigrate, reducing the Jewish population nearly to non-existence.

As a result, today, very few Jews remain in Poland, and the size of the Jewish community is estimated to be between 10,000 and 20,000. For the Jewish community, caring for these cemeteries is their mitzvah; nevertheless, it is a taxing and overwhelming

mission. As noted previously, TMF recognizes this need and labors alongside the Jewish community to care for these overgrown and abandoned cemeteries. One person remarked that the work of TMF would “testify to normal Jewish life in Poland before the Nazis . . . that people were living there [in Poland], with their trades, their loves, their aspirations.”

In an email statement, Leah declares that Poland is unlike many Western European countries, “where Jewish populations returned and re-settled after the war. or managed to remain and survive during the war.” Leah is deeply involved in Jewish genealogy and the preservation of Jewish heritage. In an email reflection regarding her participation in a Jewish cemetery restoration project, she described the Jewish cemeteries of Poland as being “largely unvisited, untended, and devoid of the usual physical markers that would otherwise identify them as cemeteries, such as signage, fencing, and matzevot.” She considers that because such “outward clues” are absent, the world around these Jewish cemeteries fails “to recognize their Jewish past and significance.”

Instead, these Jewish cemeteries appear to local Polish residents as “fallow fields, untended gardens, open spaces, children’s’ makeshift play areas,” she says. Consequently, she believes, “These cemeteries are the most vulnerable to being forgotten, built over, and erased from all memory.” The Jewish cemeteries of Poland are unique, because as Leah explains,

[They] did not die a natural death. Like their once vibrant supporting Jewish communities, they died unnaturally and often violently, their headstones ripped out by the Nazis and either destroyed or re-used as roads, foundations, public walkways, or parking lots. I volunteered to clean and clear weeds at the Jewish cemetery in Nasielsk because I do not want this cemetery to be forgotten; I do not want it to die an unnatural death.

Nasielsk today is typical of many Polish cities that have “no surviving Jewish community to regularly visit and care for its historic Jewish cemetery,” Leah states. Notwithstanding, she adds, “it does have individuals, who remember, and, who care, and, who this last week also worked, shoulder to shoulder with Nasielsk Jewish descendants and friends.” Leah considers this joint venture as a “communal gesture,” which reinforces “the visible clues that this is—and remains a Jewish cemetery.” She furthermore thinks that in some way, “we also contributed to re-establishing a historic community bond broken 75 years ago.” In closing her email, she states, “Sure, nothing lasts forever. But by our apathy, distance, or indifference, we should not and cannot let Nasielsk’s Jewish cemetery—a piece of Jewish, as well as Polish Heritage—die and disappear from memory.”

Some Jewish descendants dispersed globally in the Jewish diaspora return to Poland from time to time and attempt to reclaim their past by restoring Jewish cemeteries. Samuel is a Jewish descendant whose family origins are in Markuszów, Poland. The first time that he came to Poland was twenty-three years ago. He came with his mother to visit his great-grandmother’s grave. He states, “When I visited [the cemetery, it] was a literally a jungle, and as I have seen over the last couple of years, has remained so.” Due to the undergrowth, he adds, it made it “impossible to visit and [its overgrown condition] did not give honor to those who were buried within [it].” Other than a somewhat visible wall, the cemetery appeared to be an overgrown jungle. Sadly, this is the case for most Jewish cemeteries in Poland.

Martha is a Jewish woman, who returned to Poland with Samuel to support and assist him with his care for and restoration of the Jewish cemetery of his great-grandmother. For her, the Jewish burial grounds of Poland are significant. She states,

What it means for a Jew to have someone in their family, whether it is someone immediately, or someone generations ago, to be no more. And the honor that one pays to one's family, to the people that we love, either directly, or simply by our DNA. It is with such grace and love that the TMF does this work. I am moved by the way our team worked—tirelessly—to move literally a small forest.

Maury, who is another Jewish descendant from another town, reflects differently on his involvement in restoring the Jewish cemetery in his ancestral home. He writes in an email that by “delving into the history of this town and seeking the identities of the individuals, who lived there,” he began “caring for this ground again after a lapse of 77 years.” For him, caring for this cemetery “is overwhelmingly meaningful.”

Moreover, Maury continues, “It may not make a difference to those who rest there. But it makes a difference in the lives of their descendants around the world and, I hope, in the lives of the town's current residents.” He summarizes the state of affairs for many descendants and their family's ancestral communities in this way stating,

The Jewish community . . . lived in the town for at least 350 years until it was violently destroyed in 1939. The memory of this violence has left an inheritance of bitterness for all those who trace their ancestry to the town. The few survivors and numerous descendants who re-visited the town in the postwar years almost all reported an indifferent when not outright hostile reception from the local population. Together, this wartime violence and post-war bitterness froze the town in the minds of those who remembered it and severed all connection for those whose ancestors had lived there.

His labor over the past few years in this community “was not originally intended to establish a bridge between [the town's] current population and the descendants of its destroyed Jewish community.” Instead, his efforts were focused upon gleaning as much history as he could about the city so that he could interpret a home movie his grandfather

left behind. “But to my astonishment,” he notes, “the process of deciphering the film opened a series of opportunities to engage the local community, first with a visit by descendants, now, through the cemetery restoration project.”

### An Opportunity

Loving acts, humane orientation, and concern for others are enabled to some degree by justice/acting justly, or by doing what is right. A compassionate response should enable, provide an opportunity, or lead to doing the right thing and acting on behalf of the greater good. Linda reflects such a consideration. She thinks that the work of TMF creates an opportunity for people to act socially and provides for them “the chance to do something” for the community, which she considers to be more so actually as “doing what is right.”

Elizabeth views her involvement in the Jewish cemetery restoration project as being a part of “bringing people together in a cemetery because they know they are doing something, doing a favor, [for] somebody’s life” and for doing justice. Similarly, Allen views his motivation to be involved in the work of TMF as “seeking justice for those who can’t seek it for themselves.”

As a scientist, Linda believes, “A lot of people think, ‘Oh, you are doing it because it is your job.’ And that’s not why I do it.” Furthermore, she states, “I have too much empathy, and I know that I do, but actually, to kind of really be able to apply that [empathy] and to do something that I know makes a difference.” Linda acknowledges,

That opportunity has been provided by working with The Matzevah Foundation because we can do that as archeologists up to a point. But then to actually take it a step further, and to bring in all these people [from other organizations], you know, so I really feel that we have done something that is going to make a difference.

During the research project that we were conducting, TMF engaged, and gathered a large number of local organizations, as partners in the project. Linda recognizes that by enlisting domestic partnership created a project that is “going to make a difference long after we are not here anymore, and that is more of a difference than writing an article could do.”

Also, TMF provides an opportunity to meet and interact with descendants, such as Efrayim. Linda contemplates, “If I hadn’t met Steven, and if I hadn’t thought it would be amazing to do [a project] together, and if Steven had never said that he wanted to do it with us, then we never would have met him.” For Linda, meeting someone like Efrayim, whose family suffered unbelievable hardship, humiliation, and death, “puts it all into perspective,” and for this reason, she feels “very honored to have had the experience to meet him” as a part of our work. She realizes that this opportunity to meet Efrayim “is facilitated by the fact that you [Steven and TMF] have been coming here for years and years.” Meeting Efrayim is a significant experience and a takeaway from this project for Linda because, in the future, every time that she researches the Shoah, she will “think about him.”

When considering the work of TMF, Rabbi Zimmer contemplates the fact that “when you learn something that’s powerful and meaningful, it’s hard not to care.” Hence, he deliberates and asks, “So, the question is, once you learn about it, what are your choices?” He continues, “You can either do nothing,” or you can act. According to the Jewish tradition, he states, “When you learn about [a particular need], and there is something that you can do to fix it and make it better, you have to do something.”



For instance, when Rabbi Zimmer first learned about the work of TMF in caring for and restoring Jewish cemeteries in Poland, his initial response was: “Wow, there’s somebody that cares about this?” As he reflected further, he realized that “there’s somebody, a Christian, who cares about this [restoring Jewish cemeteries in Poland].” Previously, he had never considered the needs of Jewish cemeteries in Poland. He says, “It had never occurred to me.” The work of TMF gives him hope “because I just didn’t think . . . I didn’t think this was missing in my life . . . I didn’t even know that it existed.” Caring for and restoring Jewish cemeteries in Poland was beyond his consideration. He says, “It would’ve never occurred to me in a million years that there was a foundation with a director and a board [of directors], and volunteers that cared so deeply about something that I would end up caring so deeply about.”

Caring for Jewish cemeteries in this way for him, “was so far from my mindset” that he “would not have even known how to ask the question.”

### Three False Assumptions

When bearing in mind the need to care for Jewish cemeteries in Poland, Rabbi Zimmer considers that he “had a lot of false assumptions” about how these cemeteries were being cared for and maintained. He assumed first that “the Polish government would have taken care of absolutely everything.” Understandably, he reasoned, “there would be no need to do anything because the government would take care of it.” Second, he assumed that “the Jewish community [of Poland] would be on top of it. So, if the government wasn’t doing enough, they would’ve learned [done something about it] in on it.” His final assumption was that “nobody else cared about it.” Therefore he concludes “all three assumptions were wrong” and states,

The government isn't doing enough. The Jewish community isn't doing enough, and there is a phenomenal organization that is not Jewish in nature that is in my own backyard that is leading the way. I had three things totally wrong.

It is not that the government, or the Jewish community of Poland, is not doing enough because both are in limited ways. It is just that the need is so great, and the resources to address the long-term care and preservation of Jewish cemeteries are not readily available.

Rabbi Zimmer proclaims, "You know when you learn something that's powerful and meaningful, it's hard not to care." Mainly, he was uninformed, as many Polish-Jewish descendants are for various reasons. Moreover, as Miriam pointed out previously, many Jews in the Jewish community in the U.S. and abroad generally share three misperceptions about Poland: "It's a graveyard, there's no Jewish life there, and everybody's anti-Semitic." One of the critical aspects of the work of TMF is to make people—whether they are Jew or non-Jew, aware of the need to care for Jewish cemeteries in Poland. Rabbi Zimmer states,

I did not know in the work that you do, that the cemeteries were in this much disrepair . . . That they were neglected . . . That the infrastructure in Poland proper to do this work [caring for Jewish cemeteries] does not exist. That the Jewish community [in the U.S. and abroad] that should be doing somersaults and backflips, is not. So, now I know, and so my only option is to care.

Caring about the plight of the Jewish cemeteries in Poland is the first step toward taking action and doing something to change the situation.

### Loving-Kindness

I met Shlomi Shaked in August 2013. Shlomi is a young Jewish man from Israel, who had come to intern with the Auschwitz Jewish Center in Oświęcim during his gap year. He began to share with others and me his family's story. After the war, his

grandfather, who was a rabbi, returned to Oświęcim and attempted to rekindle Jewish life with the few remaining Jewish survivors. Eventually, the Jewish community began to dwindle as people started to emigrate. Shlomi's family immigrated to Israel. His grandfather was the last practicing rabbi of Oświęcim.

Shlomi worked with us daily in the Jewish cemetery for a week. One day while we were working, we were talking about our work in the cemetery. A few years ago, I shared with a journalist about my conversation with Shlomi that day. She later contacted Shlomi and interviewed him for a story that she wrote about me. In the story, Jan Jabben-Eilon (2015) recounts our exchange from that day and writes (p. 32),

“He had come there in his gap year and was giving a tour when he heard that we were a group of Christians. He said, ‘Jews come for a day or two, but you came for a week. Why?’ I answered, ‘Giving of loving-kindness, love, and honor. This is the root of everything I know of God.’”

Following our time in Oświęcim, Shlomi wrote a post on TMF's Facebook page concerning our conversation and the work we did in the Jewish cemetery in Oświęcim. In his post he states,

The leader of the group, Steven D. Reece told me that he sees this [work] as “*chesed shel-emet*, or true loving-kindness—an expression of G-d's love, which means that we are doing this because we care and because of the two Great Commandments of loving G-d and loving others, who are our neighbor (Shaked, 2013, para. 6).

Having concern for others or compassion is a significant human characteristic. Humane orientation may be linked with the Jewish concept of *chesed* (mercy/loving-kindness), or *chesed shel-emet*—“true acts of loving-kindness” (Sienna, 2006, p. 79). Loving-kindness is a fundamental concept and motivating factor underlying the work of TMF in caring for Jewish cemeteries in Poland. *Chesed* and charity are closely related; nonetheless, the significant difference, as Jews view the difference, between them rests on the concept of repayment.

When considering the burial of the dead *gemilut chasadim* (loving-kindness), it is viewed as “par excellence because it necessarily is done without any hope that the ‘recipient’ will repay the good deed” (Telushkin, 1994, p. 25). Furthermore, Telushkin (1994) indicates that a rabbi, Haffetz Hayyim, considered *gemilut chasadim* as “any good deed that one does for another without getting something in return (*Ahavat Chesed*)” (Telushkin, 1994, p. 25). Charity directed toward others is vitally important for people living in the community; however, the motivation or the reason behind the charitable acts is more important.

A primary question emerges from these considerations: Do people care for each other? Alternatively, we may ask: To what degree does a community take action to deal with social issues or ills that plague its society? In leading TMF, I have directed our organization and others to care and to be compassionate about the devastating impact of the Shoah upon neighbors—the community of Jews of Polish descent and their fellow Polish compatriots.

Following our cooperation in a recent Jewish cemetery restoration project, Samuel, a Jewish descendant, expressed his gratitude to me in a brief note. He wrote,

The kindness you and your flock have shown to me, my family, my friends, and the lost Jewish community of Markuszów is beyond measure. As you know, the work we accomplished could never have been accomplished without The Matzevah Foundation’s partnership and work. You, Steven, have brought into our troubled world, an institution of true beauty, and you have assembled a flock of truly beautiful souls on earth. It was a privilege to work with each one of you. I am ever grateful for the privilege you allowed me of working with you.

Although not explicitly stated in our interaction before or during the work, Samuel perceived the actions of my “flock”—those I lead in TMF, like kindness. We care, and we act accordingly.

Frequently, in my interaction with the Jewish community, I explain my rationale for being involved in Jewish cemetery restoration as a Christian. Regarding her experience with me, Miriam concludes,

But, to hear you use quotes from the Bible, whether it's New or Old Testament, to explain why you do what you do. And, you've talked about the loving-kindness and the *chesed*. Obviously, those words resonated with me, because those are the words I grew up with. And, I supposed I've never heard another Christian ever say it.

Miriam ponders the question as to why Christians “would even care?” She asks, “Why would you and your board your group do this [restore Jewish cemeteries in Poland]?” She suggests,

Since I'm not a scholar and I can't quote anything, it's the loving of another human being, the caring of another human being, the reaching out to another human being, the respect for another human being. I think that from what I've gathered is what Jesus was all about.

Caring for or loving another human being is a core principle of both Judaism and Christianity. In the Torah, we learn that we are to love G-d (Deuteronomy 6:5), and we are to love our neighbor (Leviticus 19:18). Jesus emphasized the importance of loving G-d and loving others and consequently stated, “All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments” (Matthew 22:37-40). Understanding the cross-cultural importance of humane orientation—concern for others, along with the Jewish and Christian views regarding the Torah and its application, allow me to accentuate and amplify the mission of TMF.

## **Empathy**

Empathy is an emotional ability to sympathize with someone else or share the feelings of another person. It is also related to caring, or being concerned for someone, and desiring to assist other people. It is closely correlated to compassion, or to feel with

another person. Allen relates that through working with TMF, he “acquired a love” not only for the work but “for doing something for someone else.” Tomek captures the ethos of TMF in how we “approach our work” by implementing our projects “respectably and with empathy.” Concerning his understanding of empathy, he explains, “For me, empathy is caring but in a way that is with openness,” and it is considering that “the Jews may have a different approach [in] how they want something done.” Furthermore, he states, “Empathy is being conscious of the other people’s values and importance that something has for them.”

Moreover, Tomek sees a connection between Poles and Jews as it relates to cemeteries. He says, “As Poles, we cherish the remembrance of the people in graveyards, especially with All Saints Day and similar events.” In Poland, Christian cemeteries are kept cleaned and are cared for regularly. Such care is not the case in Jewish cemeteries due to the small number of Jews living in Poland today. For Christian Poles caring for cemeteries, he says, “is something that we know is valuable.”

For this reason, Tomek believes that Jewish cemeteries are “something that should be cared for—a memory that should be passed on [to other people].” By caring for Jewish cemeteries, he sees value in what TMF does and wishes for us to share “what we have learned about the Jewish community and the values that they have.” He wishes for this knowledge “to spread out” and to be planted “in other people’s hearts,” so that they might “be aware [of them].” He asserts, “If you are doing something for the Jewish community,” you should “be concerned about what this community wants” and what their guidelines are, “so you can operate within [them].”

## **Love in Action**

When considering “religious virtue,” Tippett (2007) emphasizes that it is realized practically in terms of relationship, as “love in families and communities, and care for the suffering and the stranger beyond the bounds of one’s own identity. Christianity puts an exacting fine point on this [virtue], calling also for love of enemies.” (locs. 175-178). Love for others is relationally expressed as practical action toward the needs of someone other than ourselves. Loving-kindness, Tomek thinks, is “difficult to describe, to define exactly.” Nevertheless, he considers that “the cluster of those two words, it speaks for itself, and even if I cannot describe it exactly what it is, I basically feel that [it is] something [that] is an action.” For him, the concept of loving-kindness is driven by its values of love and kindness.

Ashley equally considers the ramifications of loving-kindness, and states, “If you care for somebody, you’re going to act. If you love somebody, you’re going to act,” because, for her, she reasons, a person cannot love another person “from a distance and not have interaction.” In the same way, she asserts, “You can’t care for something, or someone and not have interaction with [it, or] them.”

Furthermore, Ashley states, “I definitely believe that we are to care about our fellow brothers and sisters.” She believes that G-d gives people “a heart for different aspects of the world” for which he desires for them to be concerned. For her, she believes that G-d desires for her to care for her family firstly, then “it’s my friends, and then it’s the work of [The] Matzevah [Foundation]. It’s the work of [restoring Jewish] cemeteries [in Poland].” Her interest in learning more about the Shoah and her involvement in the work of TMF has become for her she states, “part of my heart” and has become “part of

my life.” She says that not every person in her life understands her involvement in the work of TMF “because it is such a unique work, but it’s become a part of who I am. It’s a part of my identity now.” Regarding love in action, Martha summarizes somewhat differently her understanding and states, “Frankly, I’m here to live my life, to learn, to reach out to other people, and to love other people.”

## **Kindness**

Over the many years that I have interacted with Szymon in caring for and restoring Jewish cemeteries in Poland, I have learned from him that he views our relationship as not being equal or primarily balanced. Accordingly, he states,

You came to me, but you are not a Jew. You don’t have to care about these cemeteries, about these graves—these are not your people, but you do treat them like yours. And, that is your idea—that was your proposal, so it’s not balanced. I have never cleaned up a Baptist cemetery.

Now that we have established a strong partnership and we cooperate closely, Szymon sees that our work will move in a more challenging direction as we commemorate the mass graves of Jewish victims murdered by the Nazis and others during WWII. He declares,

I think that we are going to work with these unmarked places, and I think we are going to get deeper and deeper into this sensitivity to the victims, and the lives that were lost—lost just because they were Jewish and that was a time and a history that wasn’t accepted. And this [work] may bring us more sensitivity, more understanding. And more kindness. I hope we are going to have more kindness.

He considers that without kindness or consideration for others, we would not be doing the work that we are doing. “If you don’t have sensitivity and kindness,” he asks: “Why would you go to some little village or little town to take care of a hole in the ground? What for?” He concludes that we “need these attributes;” they are required and



essential to our nature. At times, he considers, “We don’t have it, we can work on it, but I think we have built it over the years.”

When Szymon was younger, he recalls that he did not “have respect for anything,” including the Shoah. He declares,

I didn’t give a shit. I didn’t understand anything. I was an arrogant kid. It took many years to understand that there are things bigger than me, larger than me, more important than me. But I didn’t want to get into a mission. [What we do] is not [the] military. I don’t want to get into that kind of terminology. It’s not a mission. I want it to be my heart. I want to do it from my heart. And [the] heart needs kindness. And [the] heart needs sensitivity. Because otherwise, it is, just work.

Hence for him, he hopes that in the future through our work,

We can help, we can mark [mass graves], we can educate, and that we can become kind and sensitive and help local people to be able to understand this history and to go with them through that journey.

Our work, Szymon reasons, should be transformative and change the status quo presently encountered in Poland regarding how people view the past. He thinks that we should avoid “very simple and easy judgments, but rather getting together [with each other] and then feeling something about how life is precious, and how easily in the past, it could have been lost.”

Frequently, Szymon and I work in forgotten places, where many people no longer remember that Jews once lived among them. For this reason, Szymon thinks that “somebody from [the] outside could take a look and think: ‘Why are they spending time in this hotel and going to some hole [in a ravine in the forest]?’” He concludes, “Well, we invite all of the people who have that question to find out on their own. It’s worth it.”

### **Reconciliation**

In its most straightforward understanding, reconciliation means bringing broken pieces together. Reconciling indicates bringing together or unifying differing elements.

Among human beings, it is the recreation of a once shared relationship. Volf (2000) considers reconciliation to have more than a theological meaning, which most Christian theologians understand as the “reconciliation of the individual and God” (p. 162). Nevertheless, he maintains that justice should be understood “as a dimension of the pursuit of reconciliation, whose ultimate goal is a community of love” (p. 163).

Furthermore, Volf correctly reasons that reconciliation has a vertical dimension (between G-d and humanity) and a horizontal dimension (among men and women) and concludes that without this “horizontal dimension reconciliation would simply not exist” (p. 166). The events of the Shoah shattered relationships and widened the gap between Jew and Christian. It thrust a knife into the heart of Jewish-Polish relations, nearly terminating the hope of ever reconciling Poles and Jews, i.e., Christians and Jews. TMF exists to rekindle hope and pursue reconciliation in its horizontal dimension between Jew and Christian.

Karpen (2002) offers three critical theoretical insights as to how Christians *might* conceptually respond to the Shoah. First, he argues for the need for “an ethic of remembering,” and second, he maintains that there needs to be “a way to place memory [of the Shoah] closer to the heart of Christianity” (p. 205). Third, by way of inference, he provides a glimpse as to how to remember and bring the memory of the Shoah “closer to the heart of Christianity” by working “together on the task of *tikkun olam*, the repair of the world” (p. 206).

I may conceptually link Karpen’s hypotheses to the work of TMF. In its work, TMF focuses on practical, grassroots efforts to reconnect individual Christians (Poles and non-Poles) and Jews, or groups of Christians and Jews, who relate with one another

within the framework of Jewish cemetery restoration projects in Poland. In essence, Jews and Christians working together in a Jewish cemetery in Poland is practical reconciliation in terms of remembering and restoring.

Many people who participated in this study have different motivations for their involvement. Numerous people reflect the understanding that reconciliation is a process, more so than an outcome. Some elements that people identified as a part of the process of reconciliation were experience, learning, and change. Generally, experience and learning accompany each other, along with change. Change, in this sense, could be understood in terms of shifting personal perspectives in how people experienced specific situations, learned something, had their “eyes opened,” embraced “cultural differences,” or came to understand “the viewpoints of others.” Terms such as catalyst, mediator, and third party were applied in describing the role of TMF and how it functions in the interaction of the people involved in its work in Poland, especially how TMF “moves things forward.”

#### Continuum of Viewpoints

The people, who participated in this study, represent a broad assortment of viewpoints—ranging from religious to secular, from Jew to Christian, from board member to volunteer, and from those with long-term or first-time interaction with the work of TMF.

Rabbi Zimmer, once shared with me that from a Jewish perspective, “reconciliation is an abstract concept.” This consideration is understandably true, in light of the tragic history of Jewish and Christian relations. The notion that reconciliation is an abstraction is particularly true when considering the events of the Shoah. Joseph

Soloveitchik (1964) is more direct in his observations regarding reconciliation and maintains (p. 25),

We [Jews] certainly have not been authorized by our history, sanctified by the martyrdom of millions, to even hint to another faith community that we are mentally ready to revise historical attitudes, to trade favors pertaining to fundamental matters of faith, and to reconcile “some” differences. Such a suggestion would be nothing but a betrayal of our great tradition and heritage and would, furthermore, produce no practical benefits.

Despite this reality and regarding the work of TMF, Rabbi Zimmer considers that the reconciliation TMF pursues is “an attempt to reconcile relationships” within the Jewish and the Christian community embracing Poland and beyond. Furthermore, he states, “And, it’s an attempt to right some wrongs that have been done but to do so in a very positive, forward-thinking, action-based manner.”

Anna Zambrzycka, who, as a Polish high school student, volunteered in a TMF Jewish cemetery restoration project, recognizes that what TMF does in its work “is only the beginning of what is necessary to reconcile Jews with Poles” (Jaben-Eilon, 2015, p. 33). Judiciously, Anna articulates her point (p. 33),

We have a very cruel and bloody history, a lot of unresolved conflicts and problems between us, much sorrow and disagreement. It needs more time and more effort to improve relations between Jews and Poles. As far as I am concerned, I believe that Steven and The Matzevah Foundation efforts will help.

Faith, a Christian board member of TMF, recalls how she was raised in the Baptist church and does not “remember anyone [in her church] even specifically mentioning Jews or what they believe, or even caring to know.” In light of the Jewish experience during the Shoah, she remarks,

I think that sometimes, as human beings, we are so quick to look at the differences that we don’t even bother to try to look beneath the clothing or the hair to understand that we have so many things in common.

Therefore, she believes that “it is easy to look at something like the Holocaust and easier to see these weird people that this happened to” and say to ourselves, “Oh, well, they are different.” With this type of reasoning, she muses that we allow ourselves to “somehow maybe gently excuse what happened. Because we don’t understand that those are human beings.”

Growing up in Poland, Marek reflects the reality of nearly all Poles in their interaction with Jews. He says, “Basically from my hometown, from my upbringing, we did not have a lot of, next to none, [no] connection with our relationship with [the] Jewish community—with Jews.” For him, he knew the word Jew, “but [the word was] something that had no connection to myself.”

Allen, another TMF board member, considers that as Americans, “We tend to think in only terms of our [own] culture . . . America is the best and the greatest and the most amazing.” Such an ethnocentric viewpoint affects him as a Christian, and he confesses “there can be some pride,” in us as Christians, because “we have a relationship with God.” Consequently, he declares, “There can be a certain stigma in Christian culture” and he adds, “[we think] that we’ve got it figured out and that we know God, and that we need to go and bless the world . . . that [as Christians] we’re intended to be the blessing to the world.”

Allen raises the issue of personal reconciliation with events of the Shoah. Even though he was not present and personally involved in the Shoah, he realizes that as a Christian, many Jews tend to view him and other Christians as perpetrators and bystanders. He understands, “Why the Jewish people might associate all of us together.” Nonetheless, how does he come to terms with the way in which Jews view him and other

Christians? He explains, “I’ve learned that we’re never going to be able to right what was done. We’re never going to be able to fix what was done.” Nonetheless, he thinks that “we can remember those who died” and act—do justice, do what is right. He concludes, “So, it’s less about me trying to fix something and more about, me doing what’s right even though it can’t be fixed.”

Linda, a university professor, believes that TMF provides for her students an occasion “to be exposed to completely different fields of study and completely different people from completely different countries and different cultural and religious beliefs,” allowing them “to engage and discuss” these differences. She considers that such an environment “would aid their personal development and aid their understanding of the events of the Holocaust and racial hatred and what that leads to.” It also permits them,” she thinks, to “tackle prejudice and to tackle people’s stereotypes and xenophobia; if you can bring together people to explore diversity and to appreciate each other’s diverse backgrounds.”

Linda’s comments reflect the concept of what Mor Barak (2014) considers to be an “inclusive workplace,” which “accepts and utilizes the diversity of its own workforce” (p. 8). The workplace of TMF is the Polish-Jewish cemetery; its workforce consists of religious and non-religious people, young and old, and various nationalities.

According to Shady and Larson (2010), such diversity permits exchanges of ideas regarding a particular subject, which ensures that “learning is both cognitive and affective, involving the whole person” (p. 90). Linda connects the idea of diverse experiences, travel, and interactions with “different people from different backgrounds” as enabling her to “have a completely different outlook on life.” She desires to provide

the same prospects for her students. Kathy, a TMF board member, resonates with Linda's comments, and states, "I think what you are saying is true because I think when you open your mind once, you've opened it. And then you're open forever in a different way than you would have been."

### Transformation of Perspectives

The historical impasse that exists between Jews and Christians in their interaction is not static or fixed. Viewpoints or perspectives of people may change or be transformed via learning experiences, which may be understood in terms of Kolb's learning theory. Learning, according to Kolb (2015), may be defined as "the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience" (p. 49). This particular definition reinforces a few major emphases concerning experience from the experiential perspective. First, it emphasizes "the process of adaptation and learning" over and against "content or outcomes" (pp. 49-50).

Second, "knowledge is a transformation process" that is continuously "created and recreated," and it is not an autonomous object that may "be acquired or transmitted" (p. 50). Third, "learning transforms experience" objectively and subjectively and finally for us to comprehend learning, "we must understand the nature of knowledge, and vice versa" (p. 50). Edward Taylor (2007) emphasizes one of the "essential factors" found in a "transformative experience" is based upon building relationships with other people, who trust each other (p. 179); transformational learning is not abstract but a rather concrete and mutual experience.

It is through these "trustful relationships" that people can engage in dialogue, discuss, and share information freely, which allows them to "achieve mutual consensual

understanding” (p. 179). Shady and Larson (2010) posit that creating an “environment of inclusion” might be fostered and sustained in the classroom through building trust, which will ensure a safe environment for exploration (p. 93). Developing “trustful relationships” takes time within the inclusive context of Jewish cemetery restoration projects in Poland.

### **Changes in the Jewish Perspective**

In the work of TMF, Rabbi Zimmer envisions a new paradigm-shifting from classroom knowledge to learning by rolling up sleeves. Linking theology with action, he concludes,

So, I think what you’re doing [with TMF], is speaking to this generation in a new language and in a new way about how we can be faithful, how we can reconcile past differences, how we can fix tangible things in the world, in God’s world, that have been broken, i.e., matzevot, you know, tombstones. The new language is mutual respect, honesty, deep relationships, and willingness to get dirty—to do the work of repair, humility, [and] shared dialogue.

Miriam affirms that TMF “provides an opportunity for [Jewish] people to grow and change and rethink their, their preconceptions about Christians, Poles in Poland.” Subsequently, Miriam believes that Jews would “realize that all Poles are not anti-Semitic because they would have the opportunity to work with Poles on the ground.” In her experience, Miriam has seen that many Poles, especially the younger ones, desire “to learn who Jews are and what Judaism is and what it meant for their country [Poland].” By being a part of and working in the projects that TMF organizes in caring for and restoring Jewish cemeteries in Poland, she maintains that

[Jews would] learn to see Poles in a different light—to see Christians in a different light because you’re talking about the values that Jews can relate to. Again, I guess, they would be changed by the fact that you are doing something; that . . . of taking care of Jewish cemeteries, which is something that our heritage teaches us [to do].



Principally, this would mean that Jews would experience or come to understand Christians, primarily Polish Christians, differently because Christians were embracing Jewish values embedded in caring for Jewish cemeteries.

By giving Jews “an opportunity” to be a part of Jewish cemetery restoration projects in Poland, Miriam maintains that TMF provides the Jewish community “a chance to learn the lessons that I did . . . otherwise, they’re not going to get it.” She contends that if Jews “just go to the death camps,” it will only reinforce “our victimization.” Moreover, she continues, “I think that we thrive on the victimization, and we’d like to think that we’re always the victims.” Thus, she is convinced that TMF projects offer “an opportunity for people [Jews] to grow, change, and rethink their, their preconceptions about Christians, Poles in Poland.” Concluding her thought, she asserts, “I suppose, and obviously, if there can be better understanding and a sharing of values and see that there are Christians, who share our values, that [scenario] could have life.” She asks rhetorically, “Who knows what changes could happen in one’s life, and in the community, and the world?”

Another Jewish viewpoint considers changing how Jews acknowledge the actions of non-Jews, who are involved in or connected with preserving Jewish heritage in Poland. Rabbi Baum desires to recognize, affirm, or confirm “people’s feelings of connection” with Poland’s Jewish history. Continuing this thought, he explains,

One thing I see as a rabbi going to events is to make people [Poles, non-Jews] feel good about the work that they’ve done. And to remind people to feel good about it, that it is something important. It is valuable. And it is something that you should feel good about. It makes a difference, and it is right to feel.

In affirming the actions of Poles Rabbi Baum admits, “Oftentimes we often feel guilty about, or not sure. It is right. That this is something important.” The wide range of

projects, such as commemorations, Jewish cemetery clean-ups, educational programs, and the like, in which Poles are involved connect “the different parts of memory.” Doing so, he believes “is important.” What Poles do in these projects typically is “pretty impressive.”

For example, Rabbi Baum states, “in the case of the work the [high school] students are doing in Krzepice [caring for and restoring the Jewish cemetery]—it is a lot of work. And they have reason to feel proud for [their] work.” Considering their hard work, he reflects, “Sometimes we need people from the outside to say that as well” and acknowledge what they have done. Concluding, he states, “If everyone there [in Krzepice] is involved already, then who is the audience. If everyone is part of the performance, who claps? Continuing the metaphor, being part of a play, when you are in a performance, it changes you” and similarly . . . “it changes the people.”

Moreover, Rabbi Baum considers that the aspects of witnessing and applauding are “two different things. Both very important.” Consequently, he states,

The role of The Matzevah Foundation is to fill, to facilitate both of these processes of the people to do the work. And those who, to make sure it is . . . what is done, is done correctly according to Jewish tradition, and respect for Jewish law and tradition and custom.

And he adds that TMF “provide[s] a platform for it [the work] to be recognized properly.”

When considering our interaction over the years, Szymon ponders what has changed in him, or how his views have changed throughout our relationship. He says,

Well, I became more open, I understood that there are people in the world that come from difficult places like you [from the southern part of the U.S.], but you do not share some of the opinions and thoughts and notions that people share where you are from.

Before Szymon met me, he did not have any interaction with a Baptist as a Jew. For this reason, he says, “I didn’t know much about Baptists. I saw maybe a couple of movies, where I see people being baptized. And that’s all I knew, really.” So he has learned from our interaction that “it is more complicated than this.” More so he continues,

So I have learned something about that. There are people of different religion[s], different belief[s], from difficult places, but they have that sweetness in them, and understanding for others, and that is when I understood that even in [the] dark you can grow a beautiful flower.

In his relationship with me, he has flowered as well. He concludes, “I think I have opened to being helpful, where I am needed, even if I don’t have time, [I] find time.”

I first met Rabbi Zimmer in 2012, and we have frequently interacted over the years. “Reconciliation really is possible,” he believes, “[And,] I’m not talking about between you and me because we never had a challenge.” He continues and affirms,

But in other words, if you think about the Jews, particularly of a certain generation, who can’t talk about Poland or Germany. Can’t visit there, can’t think about it. It is just all too painful. So you have sort of helped me to understand that this act of reconciliation is possible and particularly through the groups that you are taking there [to restore a Jewish cemetery in Poland].

In Rabbi Zimmer’s estimation, the mission of TMF, i.e., restoring Jewish cemeteries in Poland, allows Jews and Christians to come together to cooperate toward a common goal. He asserts, “Differences never bother me, so particularly because our goal for the work that we’re doing is a similar outcome.” He emphasizes that more Jews and Christians would be “able to reconcile with each other if more [Jewish] cemeteries were in better shape.” He views Jewish cemetery restoration as something “very tangible,” and a means to connect Jew and Christian, which would allow reconciliation to emerge. He says, “How we get there, you know—your belief about Messiah versus my belief about

Messiah, they may be different, but that's okay." He does not view our religious differences "as a challenge in any way."

For most Jews and Christians, the concept of working toward reconciliation through restoring a Jewish cemetery in Poland is an abstract or possibly an intangible endeavor. For the Jew, the trauma of the Shoah is ever-present and for many Jews too challenging to consider. While for the Christian, Ashley reasons, restoring a Jewish cemetery is "such a unique work [and] the service aspect of what we [TMF] do, isn't understood by my peers."

In both instances, learning or educating people about history and culture is crucial. Rabbi Zimmer recognizes that there are "religious differences." He asserts, "The cultural differences have just been interesting if you are talking specifically not about Judaism versus Christianity." However, when he considers "Polish versus American [culture]," he states, "it's been a learning curve for me because I didn't know anything. I knew historical information, but I didn't know culturally [about Poles]. I mean, you taught me about attitudes and beliefs and those kinds of things . . . so I learned about it." These cultural differences do not matter to Rabbi Zimmer. He concludes, "One of these days, I would love for Americans and Poles regardless of religion to have a better understanding of each other."

### **Changes in the Christian Perspective**

Ashley realizes that from her experiences with TMF and her interaction with Polish and Jewish cultures, she has developed "new views" and has had "new opportunities" and experiences "to process," which she otherwise would not have. Furthermore, she affirms,

So, with each experience in life, something is going to change, good or bad, or just everyday experiences change you to some degree. So, the conversations, the work that we do in Poland . . . will change you, if you let it—and if you are willing to be immersed in it, and not just be a bystander.

From his involvement with TMF, Marek explains, “I learned a lot just from history,” and about the history of the Jewish community in Poland. He realizes that “there was a huge gap” in the understanding of the Jewish community’s participation “in the history of Poland, and what is their part.” By caring for Jewish cemeteries, he learned to preserve “this memory and this history” He reasons that by not preserving the memory of the contributions of Jews to Polish history, would be an “injustice—something that was forgotten.”

Faith reflects upon her experience working with a group of Jewish descendants during a TMF Jewish cemetery restoration project. She states during a focus group interview, “I think, working alongside you all, has helped me see your hearts [and it] has helped me see that we have way more similarities than we would ever have differences.” She recalls, “We have laughed, we have sweat, [and] we have been pooped.” For her, she exclaims that “this is an experience that I will never forget.” From the week-long project and interaction with this Jewish group, she learned,

It is ok to be different. But, if you let the difference[s] drive you and push you away from anything more than that, then you will always face [being] stuck in the past. And, so I am so grateful to have had this opportunity to look deeper [into your lives], and I think it will change me. I think it has.

Martha, a Jewish participant in the same focus group, shared with the team that she believes that each of them came to be a part of this project for different reasons; however, “something in our journey intersected at this place . . . I think we choose to celebrate those reasons, even unspoken reasons.” Concluding her thought, she proclaims,

The joy that we have had this journey and that we have learned about ourselves and other people, and I think all of us collectively, [who] have come to this place are changed by it.

Allen relates that from his experience, “I would definitely say that my horizon has been broadened for the much better, and for that, I am appreciative.” His involvement and leadership in the work “allows me to have a broader view of the culture that I live in and the subcultures that exist in my country.” Subsequently, he states that he has learned to take off his “rose-colored glasses, when it comes to viewing America and viewing Christianity,” which enables him to embrace “other points of view, some of them valid,” and some he continues, “I still find invalid [points of view] but it’s okay. It’s okay to be different.” In the end, he has learned, “It’s okay that my culture and their culture are different because at the end of the day we’re all humans sharing the planet. I would say that’s how I view it. So I would say I embrace cultural differences.” Furthermore, he stresses, “I would actually say that I welcome them [these differences] to a certain extent because I find it curious just to see how different people live.”

### **Changes in Jewish-Christian Relations**

During a Jewish cemetery restoration project in Poland, as I indicated previously, I conducted a focus group interview with a group of Jewish descendants and a group of Christians, who were working together. Samuel comments during the group discussion that in his life he has “had plenty of interactions with Christians . . . I haven’t personally felt the divide [between Jew and Christian] as being divisive for me.” He acknowledges,

So maybe what has changed again—among most of my Christian friends, I don’t talk about religion. In this setting, faith and religious identity have experience and how one lives it, its core to your daily life.

Samuel considers that “it’s not so much a view has changed, but I am more informed [about Christians]. And, being informed of good things” by this project.

“Again, there were no bad things I felt before. None that I was looking for, but to be part of seeing the good things is special,” He concludes.

Cheryl, a young Christian woman, ponders her interaction with this mixed group of Jewish and Christian volunteers and asks, “Who can say that I have been changed for the better?” Because she has been laboring with the group, she realizes,

I have been changed for good. And anytime you meet someone new, anytime you allow them to impact you, you allow their story to penetrate your story, and you allow your paths to cross, you are changed, and I, for me, I have been changed for the better.

Speaking for everyone in the group, she continues, “[I think] that we have been changed for the better. Because of this common ground that we were able to come together on.” While considering the project, Martha added, “I think that is part of what has been so valuable about this [project], is that everybody’s heart was in it. And we were open to what came.” It was not all good during the project she explains because “there were moments of tension and there were moments when people were upset . . . , but it got sorted out. Nothing better than that.”

Cheryl affirms, “We don’t know what our choices and our gestures of kindness and loyalty to friends, and of a desire to retrace family history,” will do. Moreover, she continues,

We don’t know what those choices will do, and how they will impact others, but it is our responsibility to carry them out with the best of our abilities and if people come, hopefully, to send them out to where they can change and do something as well.

Lasting change is only possible when people realize that any change must begin in them first, and then be passed on to others.

## **Changes in the Perspective of a Polish Volunteer**

Crossing a cultural barrier involves change and adaptation. Tomek, in his association with TMF, observed how people from America and other countries “with no, no blood relations to Jews” come to work with the Jewish community of Poland and care for Jewish cemeteries. One of his primary lessons was learning to interact with Jewish culture. He explains, “We have to learn the [Jewish] community,” because we must develop an understanding of the needs it has, especially in light of the Jewish culture and traditions surrounding their cemetery. He states, “It’s difficult to describe it for me, but this is something that brings me a lot of joy and also [has] changed my perspective too.” Helping others for him involves “the danger of trying to help, but doing it in a way that would not be something, something that would, in fact, cause harm instead of any improvement.” He has come to the place where he understands that to do good—one must respect and not harm, and do what is needed, concerning the needs of the other person.

Tomek realizes that these values “coincide, go together with my values as a Christian, as a person who follows Christ, who showed the same kind of principles, the same way of doing things as we do.” He also considers that his Christian values are also “human values, just trying to help others,” especially in light of “crossing barriers, crossing to another world.” If he were not a Christian, he states, “I probably would never do [this], because I wouldn’t see any direct value, direct revenue in a way for myself in that.”

Another aspect of Tomek’s learning is to see the other person from their perspective. The work of TMF in Jewish cemeteries brings Jew and Christian together so



that they might work together toward the common goal of cleaning and restoring a Jewish cemetery. Every Jewish cemetery restoration project has built into its structure training and orientation for the work to be carried out in the graveyard. Jewish tradition and Jewish Law, or the *Halakhah*, have various customs, provisions, and restrictions regarding what may or may not be done in the burial grounds and the work.

Since the beginning of my work in the Jewish cemetery more than a decade ago, I have invited someone from the RCC to orient volunteers on the importance of a Jewish cemetery and what may be done in the work of clearing and how to clean it. I do this so that volunteers—no matter who they are or what they believe, may encounter the Jewish perspective and learn something about it. When Tomek began volunteering for the first time in TMF projects, he viewed the work from his perspective. He thought, “Ok, so let’s clear a cemetery, but let’s do it our way.” However, when he encountered “the values that the other people had, the Jews had for this work,” he had a “change of thinking.”

As Tomek began to volunteer more and more in TMF projects, he realized that even first-time volunteers “people, with little experience about those rules, [Jewish tradition and *Halakhah*] had it in their heart and their mind, that ‘Okay, we should do it this way. It’s easier [to do so].’ But that is not what we want to do. We want to do it properly and with the respect of that [Jewish tradition and *Halakhah*].”

From his journey with TMF, Tomek realizes how his experience connects him with every person who joins our work. What brings him and them together in their interaction, and doing the work is the “learning process.” He concludes,

[The learning process] was the same as I went through, so that was very encouraging. And, made me hopeful and [it] confirmed that we [TMF] are doing something right there, if that is the response that we see with people who work with us just for a short time.

So Tomek understands that what TMF is doing as something that changes people's perspective about the Jewish community and the work that we do. It transforms their understanding of themselves, us, and the Jewish community. Tomek says, "It shows that there is a totally different perspective," as to why someone would want to participate in the work of TMF. Consequently, he says, "questions arise," and people ask: "Why do you spend this time [working in a Jewish graveyard]? Why do you want to clear Jewish cemeteries?" He realizes that he has "no blood relations with Jews, so [his work with TMF] is something that opens the eyes of other people" to the need regarding the care of Jewish cemeteries in Poland.

### **Changes in the Secular Perspective**

In one particular project, I was working with researchers and their students as a part of a grant-funded project between TMF, a European university, and a Polish-Jewish foundation to investigate the possible infliction of cultural and physical genocide within the confines of the Jewish cemeteries of Poland. I am not a scientist, but because of my relational bridges and expertise, TMF and I were invited to be partners in the project.

Dawn shares her thoughts during a focus group interview. She feels that one thing that "motivates" her is "to try to raise people's . . . basic level of understanding." She interacts with a significant number of people "on a daily basis [who] don't actually know what happened" during WWII. "They've heard of Hitler," she continues, "but they've not heard of the Holocaust. They've not heard of what happened." Somewhat dejectedly, she concludes, "They are not aware of how many people died. They think that a few thousand people died," when there were millions. Completing her thought, she affirms that is what lies behind her motivation. She wishes to make people more aware of the Shoah.

Consequently, she explains, “Even if [what I do] changes one person’s opinion or view, I’ve made a difference with that one person. And hopefully, that one person could change someone else’s opinion.”

In the same focus group, Elizabeth echoes Dawn’s conclusion and relates how her “motivation has changed,” because now she understands the reasons why people are unaware. “If you don’t know about [the plight of Jewish cemeteries in Poland], then you are not going to do anything about it,” she argues. Consequently, during her participation in this particular Jewish cemetery restoration project, she began researching what happened during and following WWII to Poles and Jews, the importance of the Jewish cemetery, and why they were not being restored. She concludes, “I fully understand now why it [the Jewish cemetery in Oświęcim] wasn’t restored to its original position and everything. I understand that now. And that, I want it to be complete. I want [the Jewish cemetery] to be somewhere people can remember.” Linda adds, “so even though all three parties are different, I think, we share that common sense of doing the right thing, whatever the right thing is, through compromise,” as we labored together in this project.

### **Changes in My Viewpoint**

I am a participant in the work that I lead. I interact with other participants as I observe them, and they observe me. Dawn, a focus group participant and student, stated during our interview that she noted “a change” in me. She observed that throughout the research project, I had changed my “views, [my] outlook on things, [and my] approach to things.” She states, “I feel like you’re taking more things into consideration.”

Additionally, she says,

You're considering other angles, by your admission [and] say, [that] you hadn't thought of it like that. Cause that's not your background. But, I see that you are thinking of those kinds of things now. You say, "I'm going to take that into consideration."

Concluding she says, "you can't plead ignorance to the issues that have been raised and things that have been brought up [during our work in this project], so I think that is one of the most meaningful things is that we definitely have learned something" in this project.

Although I have a Bachelor's of Science in Biology, I am not a scientist per se in this scenario. I nonetheless have learned that I have a seat at this particular research table because of my relationship with the Jewish community, my moral training, the experience that I have developed in working in the Jewish cemetery, and what I have encountered in the moral and ethical issues associated with the promulgation of the Shoah. Before my involvement with this research project, I have never stopped to consider whether or not I have any expertise related to such issues.

Dawn recognized changes in my perspective as I encountered new information, possibilities, or explanations. I have learned that scientific research provides valuable insights into the potential reasons, motivations, and methods used by the Nazis and others to commit mass murder and cultural genocide during the Shoah. Consequently, what we have collectively learned assists us and humanity in understanding what transpired in the Shoah through the prism of the Jewish cemetery.

### The Jewish Cemetery

The Jewish cemetery is a remnant, a silent witness that testifies to the presence of Jews in Poland before WWII. According to Kadish (2011), Hebrew uses several terms for

“a burial ground;” the main ones are “*Bet Kevarot* ‘house of graves,’ *Bet Hayim* ‘house of life,’ or *Bet Olam* ‘house of eternity’” (p. 59).

The presence of a Jewish cemetery forces people to deal with the past traumas that both Poles and Jews experienced during WWII and the Shoah. Rabbi Baum thinks that the presence of a Jewish cemetery today in a Polish community “gives them [the Poles] the ability, and hopefully forces them to, to deal with some of this.” Rhetorically, he wonders whether or not the local Polish community will ask itself “the complex question of what’s our obligation to the people who [once] lived here? What is our [responsibility], and their descendant’s? What should be our relationship with their descendants, if they had any [Jewish communities in their midst]?”

Rabbi Baum believes that the process of local Polish communities beginning to work in local Jewish cemeteries facilitates coming to terms with such questions. When TMF engages local Polish communities in its work in a Jewish cemetery, Rabbi Baum postulates, “It causes the young people to ask questions. It causes the older people to dig up memories.” He elaborates,

I think for the people to physically take part and take pride in the [local] Jewish cemetery and the Jewish spaces [of its community] . . . [It] allows them also to start changing that [situation]. Not that they have necessarily a bad attitude. But changing their perception, opening their eyes, their perception of the history, the reality of the place.

In effect, the work of TMF becomes a type of mediator of change and allows people to consider their viewpoints and change their understanding, or opens their eyes to the reality of the space of the Jewish cemetery.

Furthermore, as a mediator, Rabbi Baum believes that TMF enables Jews and Poles to interact. For him playing this role “is something that we, as Jews, couldn’t do.

And, also the Poles couldn't do either," because, "I think there is too much baggage on both sides. Too much history." He characterizes what TMF does as "taking action" and changing "the equation," along with changing "the way people feel about the situation." He says, "It shows that things can change and be changed. They are not static. And that things can remain in certain areas unresolved." He recalls a commemoration ceremony in which TMF and he both participated, where a local "priest or someone [one of the speakers at the ceremony] seemed to imply that it was the Germans who destroyed the [Jewish] cemetery." He queries,

Is that so? Partially true, I imagine. But [in] that statement there is already an invitation for both sides to argue. So, having someone in-between, who isn't so concerned about who did what, but rather changing the situation, as it is, I think [this mediator] allows both sides to move beyond [where they are].

Rabbi Baum argues that having TMF play the role of someone who is "in-between" the Polish and Jewish communities and whose goal is "to change the situation" in Polish-Jewish relations changes the dynamic. He postulates,

It allows for the Jews and the Poles to join in the work, and to join in the recognition of the place as a holy place, as an important place, [and] as a place that is of value to all people.

The process of reconciliation that is begun by initiating work in local Jewish cemeteries in Poland causes people to ask questions, dig up memories, and to be involved with the past and take pride in it. According to Rabbi Baum, due to its ability "to develop connections," long-term projects, and plans, including "an idea of how to involve everyone," TMF can change the dynamic of Polish-Jewish interactions at the local level. TMF's involvement has "changed perspective [of the local community], and changed our ability to work there, and also changed the local community."

## Catalytic Agent

Building upon this understanding of TMF not being Jewish nonetheless enables some interaction to occur between Jews and local Polish communities, Rabbi Baum views TMF therefore, as an agent that represents the Jewish community, an entity that has influence or power, and “comes [in] and gets things done.” He uses metaphors from chemistry to characterize what TMF does: *reagent* and *catalyst*. He says, “I don’t know chemistry very well, but often, in order for [a reaction to occur], you have two different chemicals that can only react if they have a reagent.” A reagent is a chemical used in a reaction to detect, measure, examine, or produce other substances. In essence, it is a chemical compound *added to a system* to cause a reaction; or to see if a reaction occurs.

Rabbi Baum also used the term *catalyst* to define TMF. A catalyst is a substance added to a system, which increases the rate of a chemical reaction without itself undergoing any permanent chemical change. A catalyst speeds up the reaction without being consumed itself by the reaction. It is independent of the chemical interaction, but then again, it is part of and essential to the reaction. In other words, without a reagent, some chemical reactions would not occur. On the other hand, if a catalyst is lacking, some reactions would never transpire, or take an eternity to realize.

A catalyst changes the dynamic of a reaction ensuring changed states, i.e., new outcomes. In applying this concept to the work of TMF, a Jewish observer remarked in an email:

. . . It wasn’t clear that [a particular Polish organization] had the organizational “oomph” to move things further until you introduced me to The Matzevah Foundation and Steven. That was the catalyst that allowed us all to reach today—as having the local interest, and an opportunity for educating the local community makes the work all the more meaningful and increases the likelihood of the effort having a lasting effect.

As a catalytic agent, TMF influences the interaction of the Jewish and Polish communities, while advancing the work, changing outcomes, and “making the work [of Jewish cemetery restoration] all the more meaningful.” Furthermore, TMF increases “the likelihood” that such efforts will have “a lasting effect.” In an email, Rowan, a volunteer with TMF, eloquently postulates how he experienced this changed outcome and its effect:

The visibility of the working volunteers and the growing visibility into the cemetery as the cutting and clearing proceeded, appeared to change how townspeople, passing by, looked at the place. What had been a wild place, undeserving of attention, was revealed as a cemetery, a place deserving of care, and an element of the city’s heritage. That the volunteers included townspeople and city staff, descendants from the region and abroad, Jews and Christians, and others with no affiliation but a desire to help, was a powerful message to me as a volunteer and to many of the passersby who slowed or stopped to look and talk.

In concluding, Rowan states, “I am taking that message with me into my own work elsewhere, but I think it is even more important that the message and the results of the work will also stay in [this city].” Because the perception of the cemetery changed, it could “be a turning point in the long-term recovery of the Jewish presence in the city.”

TMF is an agent of change, but the question remains as to why?

### Third Party

Poles and Jews share a collective history and have a complicated relationship with each other. Rabbi Baum characterizes the Polish-Jewish relationship as being intertwined and having “a very common fate” and “our common history seems to dictate a common future.” Even though a common past links Poles and Jews, “it seems to be something we don’t want to admit—neither side is ready to admit. And that also creates a strange tension, inability to work together.” This reality is especially true when it comes to matters of preserving Jewish heritage in general and particularly in light of Jewish cemetery preservation and restoration.



Many Jewish cemeteries and all wartime graves are by law national monuments in Poland, so they are to be legally protected, which they are in theory; however, in practice, they rarely are as clearly revealed in Photograph 9. For this reason, many Jewish cemeteries have been absorbed into the new landscape of postwar Poland, vandalized, desecrated, and neglected. Moreover, many mass graves lie unknown, forgotten, or not commemorated. In light of the fact that entire Jewish communities were decimated *en masse* by the Nazis during the Shoah, very few or no local Jewish communities remain, who are able to care for Jewish cemeteries.



*Photograph 9. Human Remains*

Human remains were discovered on the surface in the area of a known mass grave in a Jewish cemetery in Poland. Evidence indicates that grave robbers had violated the burial site, which is protected by Polish law. Under the supervision of personnel from the Rabbinical Commission for Matters of Cemeteries in Poland, TMF volunteers returned the remains to the earth by covering them with a thick layer of protective soil. © Copyright 2017-2019 by Steven D. Reece.

Many Jewish cemeteries in Poland are in the national registry of historical monuments. Unless a Jewish cemetery is legally owned by the Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage in Poland—Fundacji Ochrony Dziedzictwa Żydowskiego w Polsce (FODZ), or a local Jewish community, such as the one in Warsaw, the stewardship of the cemetery is in the hands of the local government and community in which it is located. Even though, all Jewish cemeteries and mass graves in Poland are under the religious supervision of the Chief Rabbi of Poland and the RCC, the RCC does not have legal ownership of Jewish cemeteries, nor does it have legal ownership of mass grave sites, whether they be known, such as in the State Museum of Treblinka, or unknown, which could be in a forest, or someone's private property. As such, the status quo that exists between the Jewish community and local governments, or locales is mixed.

Rabbi Baum theorizes that TMF also functions as a “disinterested third party” in the interaction of the Polish and Jewish communities. The term “disinterested third party” is primarily a legal term, with a varying array of definitions depending on the relevant context. Nevertheless, the meaning of the concept may be captured best by the following description from the Oklahoma Insurance Department (State of Oklahoma, 2017): “A disinterested third party means a person not related to the examinee, an immediate supervisor or employee of the examinee, and not concerned, with respect to possible gain or loss, in the result of a pending course final examination.”

The central concept for us here is that the term refers to “a person,” or an entity “not related” to and “not concerned, with respect to possible gain or loss, in the result of a pending course . . . .” In Rabbi Baum's consideration, “The active participation of The

Matzevah Foundation” changes the dynamic interchange between the Polish and Jewish communities with regards to the stewardship of local Jewish cemeteries. He thinks that when the local government or community realize that they “have a partner, something in [their] perspective on another [person] changes,” especially when they “stand shoulder-to-shoulder with them.”

Rabbi Baum links his understanding of standing “shoulder-to-shoulder” with a philosophical framework postulated by Emmanuel Levinas. He applied Levinas’ construct to the role that TMF plays in the dealings of Poles and Jews concerning Jewish cemetery restoration in Poland. Rabbi Baum termed Levinas’ concept as “shoulder-to-shoulder;” however, in actuality, Levinas used the term “face-to-face” to characterize the interactions of one person with another person—the other, or the “third party.” In brief, the third party may be understood as “the other of the other, who stands in front of me” (Corvellec, 2005, p. 18).

Leovino Garcia (2012) states, “it’s wrong to interpret his [Levinas] philosophy as if there are only two people” (para. 7), who are interacting with each other. According to Garcia, Levinas distinguishes “between the closed society of two people,” who stand opposite of each other, “and the open society, who are open to all see” (para. 7). The relationship between two people is not a closed system, but it is open to multiple others, who are viewed as the third party. Corvellec (2005) declares, “The third party disturbs the intimacy of my relationship with the other and provokes me to question my place in the world and my responsibility toward society” (p. 18).

The latter consideration has significant implications for the ethical interaction of Jew and Christian, or Pole and Jew. Corvellec deliberates the role of the third party as

disturbing “the intimacy” of the “relationship with the other.” I think his conclusion means that the third party changes something about the dynamic in the interaction of two people. The third party forces them to look beyond themselves and causes them to be aware of their social responsibility and need to address bilaterally relevant issues in their midst. Notably, the notion of the third party rightly applies to TMF and its interaction with Poles and Jews (or Jews and Christians): It forces them to address the gorilla in the room, meaning the matter of Jewish cemeteries in Poland.

Levinas’ third party framework may be associated with the metaphorical concepts that Rabbi Baum used to characterize the role of TMF in how it affected Jewish and Polish interactions. Recall that he used the metaphors of a catalyst and a disinterested third party previously to describe TMF’s role in Polish-Jewish relations. Rabbi Baum recognizes how TMF changed the dynamic of his interactions with the local government and community in Krzepice related to work in the Jewish cemetery. He reflects,

Certainly, one of the things that has changed is seeing the power of an enabler. Seeing the power of someone who comes and gets things done. If just a bunch of Jews had gone and done the work, they would have said, of course, it’s about time. By having a disinterested third party come in and do something, then it can be recognized that it had to be done. That work like this should continue. And if, well, if these volunteers from America can come and do it, then the city is like, well, we can continue it at least. It makes sense.

Finally, Rabbi Baum reasons that what Jews and Poles need, is a “shared vision,” which would enable them to create “a space for both people to project their [shared vision] . . . . And maybe through that, they can realize that they have the same [vision].” He wonders, “It stills seems to be this struggle for Jews and Poles to recognize their shared interest.”

According to Eva Hoffman (2000), historically mutual exclusion or “separateness” along with the inability “to create a common sphere of interests and concerns” seem to be significant factors that influenced interaction between Jews and Christian Poles—Poles did not want to include Jews fully, while the majority of Jews desired to keep on being separate and maintain their identity as a “nation” (p. 17).

Rabbi Baum thinks that there may be a resolution to this historical and present-day impasse by having TMF involved as a “third entity [onto] which both sides project.” As such, they may realize that TMF is doing what both sides desire—what they actually want to be done. Consequently, he acknowledges that if such awareness is possible,

The next step is to realize—it allows the possibility to realize that there really is a shared vision here. There really is a shared goal. And then, God willing allows for the step of the goal being shared, of not needing a mediary [mediator or intermediary].

In essence, then, I may conclude that TMF, in the continuum of Jewish and Polish (Jewish and Christian) relations, plays the mitigating role of a mediator, or more ideally as that of a reconciler.

### **Remembering**

Remembering is an ongoing process of recalling, or bringing back to memory something that occurred in the past. It is to be aware of or have an awareness of that past occurrence. Memory itself is the storage space of the human mind—the place where past places, events, and lives are remembered. The term “matzevah” (מצבה) is Hebrew and means a memorial stone or monument, which symbolizes remembering. It is erected in memory of a significant event or placed at the grave of a person, as in Photograph 10.

In Jewish cemeteries, the tombstone or matzevah signifies remembering and honoring the deceased and ensures that the grave will not be desecrated. Academically,

Karpen (2002) views remembering as meaning “to put back together” (p. 9). It means healing. Remembering is neither passive nor reactive, but remembering can be a proactive response to evil and its injustice.



*Photograph 10. A Matzevah Marking a Mass Grave*

A temporary wooden matzevah stands in front of a mass grave of Jewish victims executed by the Nazis in WWII. Fundacja Zapomniane and TMF placed the marker as a part of their project to erect 30 matzevot at 30 mass grave locations across Poland in August 2017. The small stones symbolically mean for Jews, “I remember you. I was here.” © Copyright 2017-2019 by Steven D. Reece.

In other words, remembering may lead to action and restoration. Judith Lewis Herman (2015) expresses well my understanding. She states, “Remembering and telling the truth about terrible events are prerequisites both for the restoration of the social order

and for the healing of individual victims” (p. 1). Some of the phrases people used to describe remembering are: preserving memory, passing on memory, bring back to memory, forgetting—not remembering, erase, wipe out memory, come face-to-face with history, keep the memory alive, family stories, and speaking to injustice.

## Memory

During a focus group interview, Martha considers the meaning of memory. “Forgotten to me means that it ceases to exist,” she states. If the Jews, who were innocently murdered in the Shoah, are forgotten, she continues, then “there is no memory of them,” and this “is wrong.” It is important to remember the past and bring back to memory the history, heritage, and culture of the Jewish people and the role that they have played in Polish and Jewish history for nearly a thousand years.

Rabbi Baum reflects the importance of how remembering the deceased is protecting their memory. He says, “Our part is to maintain their memory. And if we cannot maintain their specific memory, to honor it at least by . . . keeping [the] grave clean. To keep the place whole, intact, and at peace.” He connects TMF to remembering, or protecting the memory of the dead, as well, and states,

[It] is very much a goal also of The Matzevah Foundation—to make sure that these resting places are treated with peace and dignity. And given the dignity that they deserve. Both in the memory and the physical presence of the bodies that lay there.

Maury states all of us “are made up of memories, that is all that we have . . . in our lives is our memories.”

## **Erasing Memory**

Justice is doing what is right. Being unjust—not doing what is right is considered an injustice. Ashley attaches the word injustice to the events of the Shoah. She says, “When I think of the Holocaust, I think of the wrongness that was done. I think of evil.” The Nazis promulgated a great injustice upon the world in WWII but more so to unleash upon the Jews, the Shoah, as they systematically eradicated their physical existence, their identity, and their culture. One person stated it this way: “One of the great tragedies about the Holocaust,” was the immediate, almost complete halting of memory, and “I think that was part of the purpose of what transpired during the Holocaust, to totally erase” the memory of Jews.

The Nazis, in essence, were committing both physical and cultural genocide.

Miriam mirrors this understanding and applies it in this manner,

One of the things that shocked me the most about what the Nazis had done was not just destroying the communities and Jewish life, but they were trying to erase the fact that there was Jewish life by destroying the cemeteries, and just, erasing it.

Given such injustice, humanity cries out for justice—for the wrong to be made right.

Some may wonder why a Jewish cemetery is so vitally significant. Physically its presence in any community represents the existence of a Jewish community because one of the first things a Jewish community does when it establishes itself is to purchase land for a cemetery. Symbolically it represents the memory of that Jewish community. Linda says, “To desecrate graves of people, who are no longer there to defend themselves in any way,” is an injustice and “absolutely despicable, the lowest thing you can do.” In addition, she thinks that destroying “the memory of people, whatever religious background” they happen to be, “that’s kind of the lowest of the low.”



Ashley realizes that what TMF does in restoring Jewish cemeteries in Poland is an effort to make right the injustice of desecrating Jewish graves. She states, “Even if none of these people [in these cemeteries] died in the Holocaust, or were alive during that time,” what we do as TMF “is bringing redemption to that situation” to some degree. For this reason, she continues, “We’re doing something good for the people [Jews] that the Nazis were trying to eradicate.” Allen realizes that an entire generation “of people was just utterly wiped off the planet.” These people do not “have tombs.” They lie in mass graves and are not able to care for these Jewish cemeteries in Poland. So, as TMF, he continues, “we speak for those, we do the work for those who cannot do it themselves.”

Samuel echoes Allen’s comments. “For me this week in all honesty,” he says, “it starts from a selfish perspective—of wanting something to be accomplished in the world and the world I’m part of, specifically with the rehabilitation of the cemetery.” As he reflects, he points out the inscription on the matzevah of his great-grandmother speaks, “essentially commanding” commanding us to remember her “for generations and generations.” He states,

And the stark awareness that memory had been lost in my family, and there are lots of reasons why memory can be lost, but I have no doubt that that memory was lost because of the Shoah, the Holocaust that occurred in the middle that removed one generation’s worth of capacity for memory.

Moreover, Samuel realizes that his entire family was not eradicated, “but it removed the generation” annihilated by the Shoah. From a Jewish perspective, he concludes, “So it feels like I’m fulfilling a mitzvah, fulfilling a commandment from the past to recall the past.” In Scripture, he notes that in places such as Genesis, “There are genealogical lists which you can read them, and they seem of no purpose and can be boring at times. And sometimes I think about why are they there?”

He concludes, “I don’t know if it’s the right reason, but it’s an answer for myself, that they are there to inspire us to know about our past and the past generation.”

### **Selective Memory**

Memory can be selective, which means that the act of remembering may be subjective, prejudicial, or slanted in a particular direction or perspective—Polish or Jewish. As an American Jew, Miriam declares, “I know that some American Jews feel like saying, ‘You know Poland is ancient history and it’s not a good history, and it’s negative, and I don’t want to have it anything to do with it.’” Nonetheless, she admits,

I’ve never felt that way. I know that I grew up with the same three perceptions, I now say misperceptions about Poland, which is that it’s a graveyard, there’s no Jewish life there, and everybody’s anti-Semitic.

“I now know that those aren’t correct,” Miriam confesses and adds, “but I always felt a connection to Poland.” Likewise, Cheryl states that memory is selective and affirms, “I believe that if you can choose not to remember something, [then] you can choose to forget something.” She emphatically adds,

If you forget to remember something, and you are choosing to forget it, and I think that the past of the world, for everyone involved in world history, I believe that our past . . . shapes us, [but it doesn’t] define us.

Furthermore, she continues, “It’s important to allow events, such as the Holocaust that were horrific and terrible, to shape us in a way that we don’t allow them to come to pass again.”

One aspect of remembering that Miriam sees in the work of TMF is of confronting history by engaging local Polish communities in Jewish cemetery restoration. Consequently, she recognizes that TMF is allowing local Poles, “the non-Jewish-Poles . . . [to] come face-to-face with a part of the history that they don’t know, and they need to

face.” In confronting the history of Poland, she believes that Poles are coming to understand the past and realize that, “there really is no Polish history without Jewish history.” For the most part, she states, that many Poles “haven’t known Jews; they haven’t known the history, and they’re wanting to retrieve that, and I guess, fill in a piece of the puzzle they don’t have.”

### **Preserving Memory**

As a Pole, Tomek relates that in his “upbringing” how he “did not have a lot of— next to no connection with, or relationship with the Jewish community, with Jews.” He knew that the word Jew “existed, but [it was] something that had no connection to myself.” After he began volunteering with TMF, he learned that “there was a huge gap” in his understanding of the Jewish community’s role “in the history of Poland.” He also came to understand the importance of preserving the memory and history of the Jews in Poland because without it, he reasoned, it would be “in a way, [an] injustice, something that was forgotten.”

Similarly, Ashley perceives that the memory of the Shoah is fading away. “Within the next five to ten years,” she asserts, “we could very well not have any Holocaust Survivors living.” She perceives the role of TMF to be keeping “the memories [alive]. That’s why education is so important; not only so, that history doesn’t repeat itself, but more importantly, that these lives are valuable.” She reasons that our generation must keep in mind that “these lives are important to their communities and their families.” Lastly, she stresses,

If we [TMF] have a small hand in helping to find a headstone and uncover it so that somebody’s name can be shown again to the world, [brought back] to the light, then

that one little act of clearing that headstone brings that person back to light again. Their name is visible again.

Ashley also characterizes the work of TMF as remembering “a society and of a people that are [largely] no longer in Poland.” The heart of TMF’s work is “remembrance;” however, for her, and “as a Christian,” she says, “it’s service to the Jewish culture [the Jews]—God’s chosen people.” She states that Jesus “was a Jewish man. His family was Jewish, and so, as a Christian, that’s very important to me.” She adds, “Not everyone, who works with us [TMF], may come from that perspective, but for me, that’s important.”

In a parallel fashion, Rabbi Baum views preserving the memory of Jews in Poland, not only as service but as a debt, an obligation to serve “those who came before us.” He asserts,

They provided us with such an amazing world. They did so much. They laid the foundations of who we are now. The world we live in now. And our part in this bargain, our part is to maintain their memory.

Thus at the very least, by honoring and maintaining the memory of Jews and their role in Polish history, both Poles and Jews may affirm their contributions to the world in which they live today, and thereby establish a common basis, a mutual foundation upon which they may construct their interaction.

### **Connecting Memory**

Rabbi Baum considers that in moving Polish and Jewish relations forward is contact with people within a given community in Poland, who are interested in exploring Jewish identity, which is “not only about the [Jewish] cemetery” but “also about the Jewish identity and the Jewish history of the place as well.” He believes that in

contemporary Europe, there is “a very great crisis of identity.” To him, it seems “that people are finding, especially in Poland, more and more possibilities to identify with Jewishness. Not as Jews, but with Jewishness.”

Expounding upon what he means, Rabbi Baum postulates,

If people identify with Jewishness and therefore identify with this idea that serving God is through living ethically and morally, this could be a huge blessing for all people involved. And, if one way of expressing this is by working with a cemetery, then it strengthens us.

Commonly, he believes that “a problem with ascertaining identity is a healthy way of expressing it, . . . a healthy way of integrating it.” By embracing Jewish ethical and moral values, he considers that “instead of having to dress in black and put on a hat and [wear] *payot* (hair ringlets), it allows an expression of identity that is not in conflict with the current situation, the current world.” By so doing, he concludes, “If we can learn to be sensitive to the dead, God willing, that gives us sensitivity to the living, as well.”

### Raising Awareness

During another focus group interview, Dawn expresses that her reason for being involved in the Oświęcim Jewish cemetery restoration project is to raise awareness. She desires to “build a better understanding” not just about the events of the Shoah and how it “changed Poland and Europe,” but how it impacted “people’s outlook on things.”

Moreover, she asks,

How can we actually learn and [draw] a parallel between what is currently happening [in the world] and how learning from the Holocaust and what happened here [in Poland] and at other places, can allow people to be more aware of their actions, what they are doing? It’s not just what they are saying, what they are posting on social media, like, its everything.

Dawn considers that maybe it was a similar situation in the past, “but in different ways.” People were able to be divisive and stir up racial tension through other forms of

media. Nevertheless, she considers the availability of the Internet and its offerings of various social media platforms; undeniably, she points out that people can readily share their “poisonous views, in a lot of cases with someone in a split second.” When this transpires, she continues, “It builds, and builds, and builds,” and then, “other people around the world share that same kind of opinion.” It becomes “quite a dangerous thing,” and by so doing, people who share common and dangerous viewpoints may connect with each other via the Internet. In her Facebook news feed, for example, she notices daily racist comments or hatred toward immigrants and others.

When people post such viewpoints, Dawn declares, “They are demonstrating to me a lack of understanding of their actions, [and] their thoughts.” She states, “Everyone is entitled to their own opinions,” but at times, “people lack the ability to take a step back and put themselves in that situation.” In other words, they lack understanding. For her, it is essential to make people aware of the events of the Shoah, so that they may come to understand its underlying ideologies and their expressions in contemporary society.

Linda echoes this concern and explains her involvement in the project was chiefly to examine and come to understand the Jewish cemetery “from the point of view of the Holocaust.” She admits that in her field, a great deal of “attention is diverted away from small places like [Jewish cemeteries].” Very few investigators research “the origins of genocide and understanding how it comes about,” and how situations can quickly “escalate into something much more serious.” Frequently, Linda believes that “when people see the camps,” they do not “always get that.” Instead, she says, “They just think that somehow the camps were just there. And you know, it became this big kind of industrialized process.” It is important, she continues, “to take people back and try to

show them exactly that the Holocaust really started as vandalism and hatred, and simple things,” all of which people are capable, “no matter whether they want to admit that or not.”

Linda contends that from the research of Jewish cemeteries, “[We should] be able to do something, not to reverse” such thinking necessarily, but make some change, at least “make [people] aware, raise awareness of the fact that” vandalism and destructive acts do occur in Jewish cemeteries. By working in a Jewish cemetery, it is doing “something in a restorative way,” in order “to show that there are people who do care about it.” For her, such restorative and caring actions are significant. She is uncertain as to where her motivation arises. She states,

I don’t really know [if it is] a moral thing, a spiritual thing, a scientific thing, [or] an educational thing. And I think it is a combination of all of [these influences collectively]. There is something very raw and brutal about desecrating cemeteries.

As a volunteer working in the Markuszów Jewish cemetery, Cheryl declares, “You can use the act of remembering to make a better future, a better tomorrow.” However, she cautioned, “You can also use it—those, who are evil, can use it to repeat the mistakes [of the past] because you can choose how to use what you remember and what you know.” History can inform. Nevertheless, memory, as we have noted previously, can be selective. Even being fully cognizant of past mistakes, individuals and groups of people can choose to do good or to choose to do evil. Despite this reality, Cheryl says,

You have to learn from the mistakes of what others made, out of hatred and out of evil intent, and then go from that and choose to remember it in a way that you are honoring it [the past], honoring those that were lost.

Concluding, she says that in honoring the past and the memory of those, who suffered in the Shoah, “you are not glorifying what was done, and you are not dwelling” upon it. Instead, she thinks that people are not in a continuous state of mourning. They can remember and honor the memory of those who suffered, but by doing so, they “are moving forward with that [memory] propelling [them] to change.”

### Stewardship of Memory

Erica Lehrer (2005, 2013) introduces a thought-provoking notion regarding Catholic Poles (and others by extension), who preserve Jewish memory, culture, or “space,” as “stewards” (Lehrer, 2013, p. 125), or what she likewise terms “cultural go-betweens, or caretakers” (Lehrer, 2005, p. 136). Although these cultural stewards may be seen as interlopers or imitators by some Jews, they provide “custodial care” of Jewish culture and “hold open a place in memory” (Lehrer, 2013, p. 127).

Additionally, Lehrer borrows a Yiddish term, *Shabbos Goyim* (plural form), which is a term for a “non-Jew, who is paid a small fee” to handle tasks that a religious Jew cannot perform on the Sabbath (Lehrer, 2013, p. 127). She applies this concept to those who are entrusted with caring for Jewish culture as stewards. Furthermore connected to this concept, she introduces another term, *surrogation*, which concerns the re-creation of culture “as actual or perceived vacancies occur in the network of relationships” that make up the “social fabric” (p. 127).

As a servant leader, I view my work in Jewish cemeteries as being cultural stewardship. I serve the purpose of reconnecting Jews with their origins, as well as assisting them in dealing with the past to understand the present. I find myself, as a servant-leader, being in a middle space; I am between the Jew and the Gentile-Christian.



The reality of my status concerning TMF is that I am a public servant. TMF is a public charity, and as a steward, I realize that I am entrusted with caring for Jewish cemeteries because these cemeteries in Poland and beyond in other European locations are the remnants of thousands of Jewish communities decimated during the Shoah. Subsequently, I am very much aware of the fact that I am caring for Jewish heritage as a steward. I am not Jewish, and I realize that, first and foremost, Jews are the ones to be caring for these forgotten cemeteries. Nonetheless, on a large scale, this is not happening. I realize, therefore, that I am, in some way, the Shabbat *goy* in this scenario.

My journey on this pathway began with Szymon. As a Christian, I wanted to understand the Jewish perspective of the Shoah and how I might work with Szymon toward reconciliation. He recalls, “You came to me, but you are not a Jew. You don’t have to care about these cemeteries, about these graves.” He stated decisively, “These are not your people, but you do treat them like yours.” In his statement, we see the meaning of stewardship. It is caring for something that does not belong to you as if it does. Szymon states, “There is a huge appreciation from my side, and I think [it is the same for] the people from [the] Jewish environment that have experienced your work.”

The motivation for stewardship, such as caring for and restoring Jewish cemeteries, should be governed by the heart. Szymon considers this thought to be paramount and states, “If you want to do something right, you have to do it from the heart. [If] you don’t use your inner identity, your inner soul, I don’t think you can achieve something that will survive.”

A volunteer captures this stewardship understanding in an email that she wrote to me following her participation in a Jewish cemetery restoration project. She writes,

“Steven asked one question at the beginning of the week that stuck with me: ‘What will you take home from Poland?’ I’m pretty sure he did not mean what souvenir.” She continues,

I brought home a greater sense of servanthood. Over and over during the week, it was said, “No one would do this for the Jews. Why would anyone want to work in a cemetery?” I’m glad Steven asked us this during one of the orientations. My first answer would have been because it is a “mitzvah,” a good deed. Since good deeds focus on the doer and the deed and not the heart behind the deed, that really wasn’t quite the right answer.

She reflects further that certainly doing a good deed, a mitzvah “plays a part, but there is more.” For her, being a servant of G-d and serving the Jews by restoring the Jewish cemetery was “what stuck out.” She concludes,

Being a servant is not always going to be easy, but the Lord will provide what is needed, as he did on this trip. As a servant, I will not always get my way, or get to do what I want, when I want to.”

All the years that “the Jews were in Poland,” Allen says, “they established cemeteries for a reason.” The Jews placed “tombstones and headstones [matzevot] for a reason to remember [the] lives of these people.” He concludes, “If they were important enough to remember then, they’re important enough to remember now.” He explains that in Poland due to the war and the Shoah “many Jews, were brutally murdered . . . [and] their memory still exists there.”

Because the Nazis senselessly murdered almost all of the Jews living in Poland at the time, nearly no descendants remain, who would be able “to take care of their memory.” Allen characterizes TMF’s role as custodial, caring for these cemeteries on behalf of those who cannot. As TMF he says,

We show love, and we show care by remembering those, who have passed away, who have died in that land and whose [descendants] aren’t there to take care of them

because they were brutally murdered in the Holocaust. We do that, we do this work by cleaning and clearing and restoring Jewish cemeteries.

Remembering and caring for Jewish cemeteries may be linked conceptually with actions that not only change the physical state of Jewish cemeteries but transform communities and the interaction of Jews and Christians.

### Community of Memory

Maury writes in an email, “My goal has always been to preserve the memory of the Jewish community.” In so doing, he realized that such an undertaking “was not something I could do alone.” What he discovered “has been how the community of those dedicated to preserving this memory continues to expand.” He explains,

Beginning with the survivors and their families, the “community of memory” has grown to include members of [city’s] administration, concerned local residents, the wonderful people of FODŽ and The Matzevah Foundation, and many others, who have volunteered time, information, and resources.

Maury’s example markedly illustrates that remembering and caring for a Jewish cemetery may be transformative, creating an ever-expanding community of those who care and are preserving memory. Additionally, he views “restoring the cemetery [as] a symbol of the effort to remember the Jewish community.” These efforts—“the teamwork, camaraderie, shared the effort, and satisfaction of the cemetery restoration project,” for him, demonstrate “the living spirit essential to holding that memory.” Moreover, he contemplates the outcome of these endeavors and states,

Perhaps through this work, the descendants and the local population can begin a dialogue that will unfreeze relations and create a productive, collaborative partnership. Truly preserving the memory of this Jewish community can only be accomplished together.

Maury succinctly captures the impact of remembering and caring for a Jewish cemetery. Such actions may be transformative connecting Jewish descendants with local

Polish communities in ways that foster dialogue, improve relations, and create collaboration. None of these outcomes is possible without remembering and caring for local Jewish communities in Poland.

### **Restoration**

In basic terms, restoration is “the act of restoring to a former state or position . . . or to an unimpaired or perfect condition,” while restoring means “to bring back to the original state . . . or to a healthy or vigorous state” (Bradshaw, 1997, p. 8). Thus, restoration entails perfection or completeness and is not rehabilitation or simply returning to some state of usefulness. Restoring is a process of returning something to its “original state” of being and includes a series of steps or phases progressing toward restoration.

Moreover, restoration embraces the understanding of making whole, making right, healing, or repairing. Terms encountered in the data related to restoration are *Tikkun Olam*, repairing, redeeming, working physically, healing, and bringing wholeness. Restoration may also be understood as redemption. Redeeming a Jewish cemetery in Poland means rescuing it from the fringes of memory and returning it to a state of dignity and sanctity as a cemetery within the social framework of a local Polish community, where Jews once resided. When describing her work as a board member of TMF, Kathy states, “We restore dignity.”

The Second World War and the Shoah destroyed lives and drove a deep wedge into an already strained relationship that existed between Jews and Christians living alongside one another in Poland. Karpen (2002), defines reconciliation precisely as meaning “to restore [a relationship] to friendship or harmony” (p. 3). Wilkens and Sanford (2009) consider that redemption contains within it, “the basic idea of restoration”

(p. 196). Restoration is not merely about restoring or redeeming physical spaces or their status within a particular community, but it is more so about restoring and redeeming broken relationships between people. Questions may be raised about the willingness of Jews to seek reconciliation, restoration, or redemption with Christian Poles, and others; however, such questions are beyond the focus of this study. For TMF, restoration is linked not only with restoring physically Jewish cemeteries in Poland, but it is also focused on restoring, redeeming, transforming, or changing relationships within the social framework of Christian and Jewish interaction.

### Repairing the World

As a part of a focus group, Martha, a Jewish volunteer, states that her participation in a TMF Jewish cemetery restoration project is out of personal devotion to friends and “out of devotion to Judaism.” It is also she explains, “out of a sense of what I know about your foundation [TMF], it is deeply a part of *Tikkun Olam*—to make the world a better place.” From a theistic worldview perspective, restoration is a concept in which something that becomes “corrupt and is restored to a new condition” (Wilkins & Sanford, 2009, p. 196); this consideration infers a transformation, a change of state, or a transcendence of the status quo.

In both Jewish and Christian traditions, G-d acts to redeem his creation, albeit differently. Christians view redemption ultimately through the person of Jesus Christ, while in Judaism, Jews view the concept of redemption, as G-d redeeming them from present-day difficulties (*ge'ullah*). Consequently, in Judaism, we encounter the notion of *Tikkun Olam*, which is a Hebrew term meaning “repair of the world” (Sucharov, 2011, p. 172). *Tikkun Olam* historically has been understood in terms of restoring, restorative

works, or healing; nevertheless, in contemporary times, it “has come to connote an ethical outlook by which we strive to create a better world” (Sucharov, 2011, p. 174).

Furthermore, restorative work or repair is viewed as “a process that extends beyond the bounds of the dyadic field [interaction of two people] to include the surrounding world context” (Sucharov, 2011, p. 175). According to Pinder-Ashenden (2011), “the concept of *Tikkun Olam* surely resonates strongly with devastated souls yearning for healing and redemption” (p. 134).

The work of restoration involves repairing the broken world around us. Restoration in and of itself is a process and not a product. Martha says, “There is so much that is so wrong, and we don’t have a corner on that [at] any place or any time. But this [project] is an opportunity to set something right.” Broken bones need to be set for them to heal. It is a painful process initially, but in the end, the bone is healed.

Restoring Jewish cemeteries demands sacrifice from those involved. It is hard work. After several days of labor, Martha says, “I have been a worker bee like everybody else. I ache and am tired, but it is a good tired, and it is a good ache.” Other sacrifices that people make are not so obvious. For example, when Jews and Christians work together in a TMF Jewish cemetery restoration project, typically, they live in the same place, share the same conditions, and eat at the same table.

When considering that some Jews keep kosher (kashrut), preparing meals for a large group of people is a logistical challenge. As a Jew, Samuel explains, “I was very upfront with everyone [in my group] saying that this part of the week is communal style living,” in which we would keep kosher by not eating meat, but only vegetables. For

TMF, Samuel understood that it would be a matter of choice; nonetheless, the TMF group chose to eat the same foods. When he learned of their choice, he explains his reaction.

I was incredibly touched when The Matzevah Foundation group voted or chose before to go for this period to eat the same food. I realize it makes life in the kitchen obviously much easier. So there is a practical aspect. But it, it was very touching, and I really [think] it was a sacrifice that you didn't need to make. But I appreciate it on both levels—the practical and the spiritual gesture, the meaning of that [gesture].

In being a part of such a project, Martha realizes that the work of restoration is “trying kind of like maybe divert—[it] may not be the right word, kind of bringing the attention away from the suffering” that is seen in other forms such as in the camps. Instead, by restoring a Jewish cemetery she says, “[we are] trying to allow this [work] to be where [people] can remember that there once was a Jewish community here, and . . . kind of like remember it in that way.”

For Samuel working with TMF in Markuszów firstly is about connecting with his “personal past.” Secondly, Samuel views his interaction with TMF has “a secondary gain of getting to know” one another. Beyond these two considerations, he reflects,

Being on the spot [of] the work of restoring dignity, the process of restoring dignity to a place that is meant to be a place of dignity that had it stripped, is incredibly meaningful. As I remarked before, how beauty is rare in the world, even to be part of something of beauty, is a privilege.

Miriam asserts that restoration has two dimensions: physical work and healing. When characterizing the physical effort involved in Jewish cemetery restoration, she says, “[It] is a more concrete, material level that is actually cleaning up, working on Jewish cemeteries in Poland.” The healing dimension, she states, “Is really the motive behind it [restoration], which is to try to heal the wounds from the Holocaust between the Jews and non-Jews.” These two sub-themes are carried forward in the data by other voices.

## Physical Work

The restoration work of TMF, Rabbi Zimmer, states, “is about restoring gravesites that have been destroyed.” Jewish cemeteries in Poland are unique in the landscape of Poland. They are relics of the past and are constant reminders of the tragic, moral failure of humankind, as shown in Photograph 11. In many instances, Jewish cemeteries are places where people dump their garbage, walk their dogs, graze their cattle, drink beer, and carry out a host of other abuses.

Rabbi Baum asserts, “People don’t put their trash there because there is nothing there. They put their trash there because there is something there.” He also views Jewish cemeteries as creating “some kind of psychic suck hole” in local Polish communities. Although it is not always the case, he argues that the presence of Jewish cemeteries creates a great deal of “guilt and anger and fear” within the community. He reasons, “By going in and taking out the trash, and cleaning up and opening it up, it seems to do a tremendous amount for the city and the people there.” It makes the local Polish inhabitants aware of the cemetery’s presence and potentially its importance as a resting place for the dead.

Most Jews view burial grounds differently than Christians, or other non-Jews. According to the *Halakhah*, the cemetery is the eternal resting place of the dead and cannot be disturbed. The land itself may not be used for anything other than a graveyard. The most important aspect of a Jewish cemetery is not the matzevot (headstones), but what lies below the surface of the ground—the deceased.





*Photograph 11. A Matzevah Fragment*

In many Jewish cemeteries in Poland, only fragments remain of the once ornate and poetically inscribed matzevot. These matzevot mirror the once vibrant Jewish community that was decimated during the Shoah. Here a TMF volunteer displays a matzevah fragment he recovered in a Jewish cemetery. © Copyright 2017-2019 by Steven D. Reece.

The physical aspect of TMF’s work of restoring Jewish cemeteries in Poland is, as Ashley explains, doing “the work of clearing and cleaning the grounds [of the cemetery].” In restoring a Jewish cemetery, Rabbi Baum considers that “working hard with other people, . . . builds bonds. It breaks through in ways [to the] other.” Restoration of Jewish cemeteries is comprised primarily of three major phases:

1. Clearing and cleaning the cemetery of debris and undergrowth,
2. Commemorating the cemetery,
3. Reestablishing the cemetery in some manner in the psyche of the local community.

The first phase of clearing the cemetery of green growth and debris is the most labor-intensive and depending upon the size of the cemetery, requires the most considerable amount of time. A typical cemetery project will run five working days, so a team of up to twenty or so volunteers can clear a “small” cemetery with an area of about 0.5 hectares (one acre) in four to five days. Larger cemeteries will require several seasons to clean, and consequently, TMF will work with Jewish descendant groups and local volunteers to clear the cemetery for as long as it takes.

Commemorating a Jewish cemetery occurs once the cemetery is cleared and is done to rededicate the cemetery and to honor the memory of the Jewish community, who once resided in the town. Reestablishing the validity and importance of the Jewish cemetery in the mind of the local community is an ongoing process. To this point in its work, TMF has not fenced any Jewish cemeteries; nonetheless, doing so is considered the best method of protecting the graveyard, and countermeasure against future vandalism.

Concerning the physical work that takes place in a Jewish cemetery restoration project, Samuel states in a focus group interview, “So we are restoring. We are talking about restoration.” He describes the impact of the physical work in this way,

We can't make right what happened when it comes to the extermination of a people. But we can set the tombstones, the matzevah [headstone], we can set them upright. Either physical, literally, or just by virtue of us having worked there for three days.

Samuel compares his experience in working with TMF and other volunteers to that of his experience of being a counselor in a summer camp, where the people lived and worked communally. During the project, the TMF group lived with each other under a common roof, shared meals, and communal bathrooms with each other for five days. About the experience he says,

You know, being in close quarters, working together, physical labor, sweating together, I guess it can go two ways: A group can kill each other, or they can get along with each other. And clearly, we bonded. There were no killing tendencies here.

In the same focus group, Martha shares her concern about the ambivalent nature of clearing the cemetery of debris. She says, “I’m torn because the earth swallows things up, whether we like it or not. And all of the work that we did these past three days it’s absolutely extraordinary, but nature will just keep coming back.” Nevertheless, she sees some hope and refers to a “wonderful little man coming into our presence and saying, I’ll help you with this [green growth].” She states, “And you think, ‘Oh, Ok. So maybe it’s not going to, next year, be overgrown again,’” but she continues, “it could be. So I’m ambivalent because the world swallows things.”

In a blog post on Rohatyn Jewish Heritage, Jay Osborn (2016) described the physical nature of the restoration work conducted by TMF in the Nasielsk Jewish cemetery (para. 6),

The work was heavy, requiring considerable stamina, the use of large motorized cutting tools, and constant dragging of fallen branches and large stems plus raking of smaller plants as they were cut. The work was organized by TMF to proceed efficiently with the available tools and labor; typically, one or two “draggers” were needed for each “cutter” to keep the front of the thicket clear for access by the cutting tools. The objective was to remove all of the smaller vegetation down to near ground level, to retard the return of fast-growing shrubs, and to simplify future cemetery maintenance with herbicides.

Osborn points out that “this work sounds simple but isn’t, and even the most experienced volunteers had to adapt to the site conditions” (para. 10). Additionally, in his post, he describes the ongoing nature of reestablishing the validity and importance of the Jewish cemetery in the minds of the local Polish community. He characterizes it in this way (para. 8),

The social aspect of this work is a significant part of its ongoing value. As one of the volunteers noted, the international and interfaith volunteer crew working together with local leaders inspired curiosity and goodwill in the local community and sparked many impromptu encounters at the cemetery on shared history and heritage.

Although not present to such a degree in every Jewish cemetery restoration project, social interaction is a direct outflow of the physical work. Such a social exchange is essential in the process of restoration. It is also a form of diplomacy.

### Jewish cultural diplomacy

Osborn (2016) states, “This is a model we have seen work in many places, and is promoted by Jonathan Webber and others in the European Jewish heritage community as *Jewish cultural diplomacy*” (para. 8).

I would consider Osborn’s conclusion to be appropriate but inaccurate. What TMF does is Jewish cultural diplomacy, but as an organization, we are not comprised of Jews. Because of the work that we do on the ground—being physically present and working in Jewish cemeteries as a representative or an agent of the Jewish community, many Poles with whom we interact assume that we are Jewish.

Indeed, TMF functions as a cultural diplomat, much like an ambassador does in matters of state. We may connect this dimension of cultural diplomacy to that of Rabbi Baum’ statement that TMF acts as a representative of, but does not fully represent the Jewish community and his concept of “disinterested third party” or Levinas’ notion of the Third Party. In the continuum of Jewish and Polish (Jewish and Christian) relations, as I noted previously at the close of the sections of relationships and reconciliation, TMF plays the role of a representative of the Jewish community, and it functions as a mediator or an agent of reconciliation.

Rabbi Zimmer notes that TMF “is doing something that very few people in this world are attuned to or have given thought to.” The uniqueness of restoring Jewish cemeteries in Poland is striking for him. When he first became aware of the work of TMF, he said, “Wow, there’s somebody that cares about this? But then I thought further, and my further reflection was, wait a minute there’s somebody Christian who cares about this.” Likewise, he states,

I love doing that work, but to do it on a project that I would have thought would [be] only of Jewish interest and then to learn that it is not only of Jewish interest but is being driven by a group that is not only of Jewish interest. That is so compelling to me and so exciting, and it gives me hope for the world and for what we all can do together if we roll up our sleeves.

For Miriam it raises the question: “Why you as Christians, American-led would want to go to Poland and find these cemeteries and rejuvenate them . . . I don’t know if that’s the right word . . . restore, care for them.” Certainly, the need to restore Jewish cemeteries in Poland exists because she reasons, “There aren’t Jews on the ground [in Poland] for the most part to do this work.” Nonetheless, TMF’s involvement in restoring Jewish cemeteries speaks to the local Polish community. Miriam reflects,

I think it says something to the Poles even if they’re not part of the actual work; they see what you’re doing obviously, those who find out about it. And, I believe it fits from what I saw of Poles, especially young Poles, who want to not just restore cemeteries but find out, restore history, the life of the Jewish community in Poland.

The work that TMF does is more than merely working physically in a Jewish cemetery in Poland. Our effort is centered on diplomacy—crossing borders and being peacemakers in the continuum of Jewish and Christian relations.

Cathartic moment

As Rabbi Baum indicates, working in a Jewish cemetery in Poland raises past issues in the life of the local Polish community. Restoration work leads many people to

reflect, dig up memories, reclaim the past, or take pride in the Jewish history and heritage of their community. Rabbi Baum states,

And also perhaps asking some difficult questions about what, what actually did happen. I don't mean to imply that . . . Poles are guilty. Some are, some aren't. Some Jews are guilty of some things also. But to start dealing with the complexity of it.

By dealing with the cemetery in some way physically, it becomes cathartic, because it allows for the people involved in a particular Jewish cemetery restoration project to begin to lessen emotional tensions or express pent-up emotion. Regarding the physical work occurring in a Jewish cemetery restoration project, Rabbi Baum states, "It seems to take the sting, some of the venom out of this [past history or tension]. I don't think Poland is a place that has forgotten its past. It's rather a place where its past was stolen from it."

The work of The Matzevah Foundation assists Poland to reclaim its true past, true heritage, and Jewish history that was taken away from the Polish people. Rabbi Baum concludes,

I think [the work of] The Matzevah Foundation allows Poles to deal with their past both physically, or at least to initiate it on a physical level, which then has the ability to be taken to an emotional, intellectual, and hopefully spiritual level. [The work of TMF] allows also for the Poles to have contact with Jewish descendants [from their community], or at least the Jewish community in Warsaw, or the other [Jewish] communities [across Poland].

The critical outcome he believes is that it expectantly advances the restoration process, "which helps to move along the relations, the dialog between Jews and Poles. It also allows the Jews who want to have some connection with their past to do this."

## Healing Wounds

Frequently people connect the work of restoring Jewish cemeteries in Poland with healing. Allen believes, “We [as TMF] work physically in the land, we work physically on the soil to heal the land,” and consequently he thinks,

Through those projects, through the time spent on the ground in Poland, through hard labor, sweat, getting worn out, doing basic gardening, basic yard work in cemeteries, I just gathered or acquired a love for, not working in cemeteries, but a love for or a passion for doing something for someone else that they can’t do for themselves in taking care of a Jewish cemetery.

Also, from the TMF perspective, Ashley understands that the “ultimate goal” of the restoration work of TMF “is to bring healing and restoration to the different people groups that are involved in the work.” Additionally, Faith states, “In the time that I have been involved with [TMF], part of [my journey] has been a very painful journey. I think that I have come to realize that the predominant thing for me in this journey is separation.” She views this sense of separation as being separated from loved ones, who were placed on trains in cattle cars and sent off to their deaths. She explains, “I think a large part of my journey has been somehow maybe [been to] struggle with it—try to repair that separation.” She adds,

A good friend of mine, he and his wife, are Jewish, and her family—a lot of her past family, died at Treblinka. And, I saw the day before I left for my third trip [to Poland], I believe it was, and she just grabbed me, she knew I was leaving, and she just sobbed, and she said, “Thank you for doing what I cannot do. But it must be done. It cannot just slip into the mist of the past.”

Faith asserts, “Just because it’s in the past doesn’t mean that it is over. And, there are repercussions, and we need to continue working for restoring what was lost and what was done.”

From the Jewish point of view, Miriam considers,

Cemeteries that were practically erased are in such disrepair and not . . . acknowledged. You are, I don't want to say bringing it back to life, but it seems such a strange thing to say about a cemetery, but that's what you're doing."

Moreover, she contends that because, as TMF, we invest our time, money, and effort "into doing the work . . . it says that [we] are committed to this healing process." She states,

You're not just espousing ideas of, "Oh, let's kumbaya," and the world is going to get back together again. You're actually doing something on the ground, and you're actually doing something, which I think is a lot more meaningful.

The essential aspect of restoration is the linking of Jew and Christian in the physical space of a Jewish cemetery allowing substantial interaction. Elijah illustrates this aspect for me. Elijah and I worked together several times in Jewish cemeteries in Poland. In one of the particular projects in which we were cooperating, I privately encountered anger from one of the Jewish participants concerning what transpired during the Shoah. In an email, I later asked Elijah what he thought about such an expression of anger. "I think," he states, "[the person's] emotions reflected the tension between [their] hope" that the project we were carrying out "helps in *Tikkun Olam* and the recognition that it is a process rather than a finished product." He concludes, "The mutual hope is that our work brings full healing between Christian and Jew," and particularly, we hope it facilitates healing "between Christian Poles and Jews."

In another email, Elijah relates how he views TMF representatives as "simply God's servants to humanity," and expands the thought further by stating,

Their warmth, devotion, dedication, and unstinting determination through two full days and two half days of strenuous yard-work, in essence, the complete taming of a jungle to return it to the sacred space of a Jewish cemetery, were a model for the good that is possible in every human being. This summer, they restored the lost dignity of my ancestors' cemetery, and I am always in their debt.



Physically working together in a Jewish cemetery in Poland, deals with the past, raises questions, and leads to far-reaching interactions.

### Navigating Restoration

Restoration at times requires an advocate, a guide, or a counselor, i.e., someone who can assist parties in navigating the process of restoring a Jewish cemetery in Poland. TMF plays such a role, according to Rabbi Baum. He states that TMF aids the Jewish community “to navigate, to help us communicate, to help us do the work; and, to see where to go, what to do now, and how.” He considers that a great deal “of our ability to perceive what to do next, is dependent on our ability to perceive what is [next].”

For example, in Krzepice, Rabbi Baum considers that for the Jewish community to have “contact with the [local Polish] people and being in communication” with them has changed the interaction. Concluding he states,

So with the school [in Krzepice] putting boots on the ground [and] with The Matzevah Foundation coming and putting boots on the ground . . . this has changed everything. This has shown them [the local school in Krzepice] that it’s deeds and not just words. That there is not only interest but dedication and also that it has continued and [is] continual.

Furthermore, Rabbi Baum emphasizes that there is a need to recognize “that these [Jewish] cemeteries [in Poland] are disappearing, [and] that [they] have been desecrated.” Continuing, he states that Jewish cemeteries “are a holy place, and they deserve to be or even demand to be cared for and restored.” They must be cared for and restored “because of the dignity of the people and because of the dignity of the place.”

In the case of the Markuszów Jewish cemetery, TMF worked with the Jewish community of Poland, Jewish descendants, and the local Polish community to clean and clear the graveyard. At the end of the week of work, a commemoration ceremony was

held to rededicate the cemetery and honor the memory of the former Jewish community. Approximately 100 people from the community attended the service, along with the archbishop of the local Catholic diocese, government officials, and representatives from the various volunteer groups involved in the restoration. Rabbi Baum contends, “so, that in this process, it was The Matzevah Foundation that was the enabler,” which brought all of these pieces together. “I think,” he states, “[what TMF did] is a very good thing. It is something that we as Jews couldn’t do. And, also, the Poles couldn’t do either.”

For Rabbi Baum, the most critical aspect of restoration is “the preservation of Jewish cemeteries” and from preservation to safeguarding “respect for the dead, for the past.” In the midst of restoration is ambiguity, and subsequently for Rabbi Baum addressing these issues, “raises many more questions than it answers. And realizing that the answers aren’t so simple, but the questions still need to be raised.”

According to Rabbi Baum, “almost every [Jewish] cemetery has a mass grave.” When considering the matter of restoration and the ambiguity of “the history before the Shoah, then you have what happened during the Shoah, and then what happened after the Shoah,” He wonders and rhetorically asks, “Does it matter?” He continues,

On the one hand, I guess not. I guess you can do the work without really caring who did it. Why is this [cemetery] in the condition that it is in now? You know, you could just say, this is the way it is. But, being there always begs the question . . . the place just begs the question . . . What were these sins? You know? What is this atonement for? Who are we healing here? Who are we trying to save?

The questions that Rabbi Baum is raising are wide-ranging and reflect the need to deal with the much more profound matters of restoration, not necessarily of restoring physical spaces but that of the space between people.

The Second World War and the Shoah were traumatic to both Jews and Poles; nonetheless, they suffered disproportionately. Navigating the suffering and the resulting trauma are along the path of restoration and must be confronted. Rabbi Baum thinks, that in terms of “refusing to deal with the dark, dark aspects of the war,” being on this pathway is going to allow Poland to “recover [from] this trauma [but] it will take even much longer to be able to heal it.”

Some people would say that there needs to be something—some confession or admission of guilt that needs to come first before healing could occur. According to Marc H. Ellis (2011), forgiveness is revolutionary when “justice is at the heart of reconciliation,” and when this type of forgiveness ensues “a new history is created,” in which an offense of one neighbor becomes an offense “against both” (p. 14). From such an understanding of reconciliation, “history experiences a healing,” and hope emerges (p. 14). At this point, we may submit that restoration is a process leading from the restoration of relationships (healing), to that of reconciliation and possibly forgiveness.

Rabbi Baum states, “So, according to our tradition before you can have your sins healed, you have to confess. This [statement] is true, but it is a personal confession.”

Furthermore, by dealing with issues along the pathway of restoration, he thinks it moves “things forward, it allows for a confession.” He declares,

Catholics think that you are guilty until confession makes you innocent. Jews think that you are innocent until guilt makes you confess. But I think, you know, with sin in general, the more you dig into it, you feel, it’s like trauma, the more you dig into it, the more you find that it is there. But also the more you are able to release. So, I don’t know if it’s a national undertaking or an undertaking of individuals.

Despite his uncertainty about who bears the responsibility in this undertaking, Rabbi Baum is convinced that “[Jewish] cemeteries seem to [be] the focal [point], a very

strong place that holds its trauma very strongly.” He thinks, “It’s a trauma that needs to be released.”

“In general,” Rabbi Baum points out, “these local communities aren’t ready yet to initiate this [healing process] on their own.” He believes that for whatever reason, local Polish communities must begin the healing process with “something small,” such as the local school going to Jewish cemetery “to clean a bit, to do something [in it].” Nevertheless, he considers, “But to do something bigger, which in general they have the ability to do, they wouldn’t think to do.”

Therefore according to Rabbi Baum, TMF “serves first and foremost [as a model]—they show that it is possible, physically it is possible” to deal with the trauma of the past, and “it is also possible to join in [the work].” Likewise, he states,

There certainly is this question about who should, you know, how you can partner with others in this [effort]. If we can partner with others, who are here now doing this work, with us [Jewish community], maybe we can partner with others, when it comes to our past. Maybe we can find a place to accept that. That our path isn’t, that our past isn’t one story, and the people who lived here weren’t just one people.

When considering the Polish people, Faith observes, “I’m not sure that they are ready to move forward. How do you move forward? I don’t know [the answer to] that either because I’m sure that WWII was a devastation for them as well.”

In light of these complexities, Martha also asks, “How do we move forward? And I don’t know the answer to that.” Even so, she thinks that the question of “how do we move forward, shouldn’t stop more, and more people [from] being involved in a restoration and a rededication of Jewish life in Poland.” On the other hand, Faith reflects upon this conundrum optimistically and states that she would like to return to Poland in

thirty years, and learn how Poles have “embraced the past and propelled themselves into the future, [so] that they can love abundantly and overcome those differences.”

### Restoration Process

Restoration is an action; it is an act of returning something to its former state. Martha asserts, “You can’t restore something unless you understand what was disintegrated. You cannot.” Therefore, she considers it is imperative that “we first have to understand what was disintegrated and then only with that understanding can we restore.” Consequently, she states,

And that is why somebody who has the kind of knowledge that Samuel has and the people with the [Polish] institute here, and you [Steven] and the Foundation [TMF], you [all] have an understanding of what was before. So [in] restoration, you can’t restore it unless you have an understanding of what [happened].

Samuel considers that in the restoration of Jewish cemeteries, “we can never restore what was there” previously. The Jewish cemetery represents the life of the Jewish community that breathed in Poland for nearly a thousand years. The Nazis brutally and senselessly destroyed the Jewish life of Poland. This former Jewish life in Poland, this period, and these specific communities cannot be restored. These pieces of Jewish life in Poland are forever lost to history.

Nonetheless, their memory can be preserved through the process of restoring Jewish cemeteries. Samuel states, “So the choice of using the word, restoring, or restoration, refers to a process.” He reasons that the process of restoring Jewish cemeteries is something “that we can do, and that you [Steven/TMF] do.” For him, he concludes, “That’s a very hopeful approach to something that is an impossible task, but a valuable task.”

## Understanding the Needs

Restoring a Jewish cemetery is a complex undertaking. First, the space of the Jewish cemetery is governed by Jewish Law or *Halakhah*. Understanding the *Halakhah* and the Jewish customs and traditions associated with cemeteries is required for conducting any type of restoration work in a Jewish cemetery. As noted previously, Rabbi Baum declared that TMF works “to make sure it [the work] is done, is done correctly according to Jewish tradition, and respect for Jewish Law, and tradition and custom.” TMF ensures that it invites members of the RCC in Poland to orient TMF volunteers in principal halachic practices and customs associated with the Jewish cemetery.

Several years ago, Tomek learned as a first-time volunteer with TMF the importance of the *Halakhah*, when someone from the RCC “shared the knowledge about customs and different approach[es] to the property of the cemetery from a Jewish standpoint.” For Tomek, this Jewish viewpoint “was something so different,” from what he knew that it changed his outlook on the Jewish cemetery. Now when he participates in a Jewish cemetery restoration project, he operates “with those [Jewish] values in mind.”

Consequently, Tomek intrinsically empathizes with these halachic values and links them with ethical practice associated with Jewish cemetery restoration. He notes, “How one can help and also [there is] the danger of trying to help but doing it in a way that would not be something, something that would, in fact, cause harm instead of any improvement?” *Primum non nocere* is an ethical principle advanced by Hippocrates, which means: “First do no harm, or above all else do no harm.” No maleficence is not harming, while beneficence is doing good.

Tomek points out that initially, his thoughts as a volunteer were centered on doing the work and considering it only from his perspective, his understanding. He reasoned, “Beforehand, I would value that as okay, you are trying to help so your motivation is something that redeems the work, even if you do harm.”

In other words, Tomek considered that the restoration work could be done incorrectly, harmfully because the motivation is good. Ethically he realized that “there is a big value in that you first try not to harm” and “actually work against what you want to do.” He thinks that respect is required for Jewish values, and to gather “information about what you can [do to] help.” To this end, he states, “Well, what we do I see, first of all, is research and check what we can do and what is desired of us. And within those limits work to bring good.”

Elizabeth, a university student, is another volunteer, who learned about the importance of understanding the process of restoration. She learned about the work of TMF being “about restoring, reconciliation, and making sure that the [Jewish] cemetery—the restoration of the cemetery was done to the needs of not just Jewish people, but people who could visit.” Her latter observation is critical with regards to the restoration process. To what degree of restoration should a Jewish cemetery be returned? If a Jewish cemetery is restored entirely to its original condition meaning all the damage is repaired, all the matzevot are pieced together and erected, and all the graffiti is removed, then how will people, who visit the cemetery understand the destruction and desecration carried out by the Nazis and others in the space of the Jewish cemetery?

Ultimately, Jewish cemeteries are to be protected and preserved, as they are, for the most part, except for the provision of fencing when financially and physically

possible. For the Jewish community of Poland, tasked with their care, what is essential primarily is restoring and preserving the dignity and respect of the cemetery as the eternal resting place of the dead. As indicated earlier, Kadish (2011) identifies one of the Hebrew names for a Jewish cemetery is *Bet Hayim* “house of life” (p. 59), or, as many commonly refer to it, the house of the living. Elizabeth concludes, “So my motivation now is [to] understand, yes [to] understand Jewish culture and I fully understand now why [the Jewish cemetery in Oświęcim] wasn’t restored to its original position.” She would like for the Jewish cemetery in Oświęcim to be a place for people to visit and remember.

Annually more than a million people visit the State Museum at Auschwitz and Auschwitz-Birkenau in Oświęcim. When Elizabeth and other students from her university visited Auschwitz, she noticed “how many Jewish people [were] there. We saw a lot, a lot of people with Israeli flags.” She realized that most of those who were visiting Auschwitz did not know probably about the Jewish cemetery in Oświęcim even though it is “only five minutes down the road.” She wondered when considering the history of Oświęcim and the condition of the cemetery in “ruin, would they want to come here?” In light of all of the destruction associated with the War and the Shoah, “they probably wouldn’t,” she said, “Because it’s another place for them to hurt.” Despite that fact she thinks,

But if [the Jewish cemetery in Oświęcim] were to be presented in a way, where they can remember, and information [were] to be shown of what it used to look like and things like that, maybe they would develop an interest in that, and it would be another place for them to come and visit.

In Poland today, more than 1,200 Jewish cemeteries dot the landscape. Each cemetery represents a Jewish community that at one time, lived in that particular place until the time of the Shoah. A large percentage of the global Jewish population trace their



roots to these towns or shtetls, where their ancestors once lived. Part of the restoration process is to restore to memory such places, so that subsequent generations of Jews may reclaim their heritage no matter how painful that may be. The silent witness of the Jewish cemetery speaks eloquently to non-Jews, as well, reminding them that the Shoah indeed occurred, and a generation of people was decimated because they were Jews.

### **Expanding the Knowledge Base**

For me, I have worked in the space of Jewish cemeteries in Poland for more than fourteen years. Frequently, I wonder what happened in these cemeteries, such as the one in Oświęcim, where the Nazis desecrated it. When Linda and I agreed to lead our organizations to cooperate, we had in view a joint undertaking of conducting scientific research and restoration works. From her point of view as an academic researcher, what she sees as being principally important is performing on the ground research in a Jewish cemetery in Poland “that leads on to informing some of the restoration [work].” She “felt it was that end bit [of restoration work] that was missing [from her work].” She considers that the work her team was doing in “documenting all of this evidence” that they discovered, as a part of their investigation is highly worthwhile. One participant in the project states, “We all here want to make some sort of difference. We all here want to contribute [to] the general knowledge and general understanding that surrounds Jewish cemeteries and the associated sites.” Indeed scientific research informs the restoration process by documenting what remains and contributing to the broader knowledge and understanding of Shoah research.

Nonetheless, the bonus for Linda is the opportunity to participate with TMF in a “very onsite practical restoration [project],” which would allow her to involve her

“students in what benefit the work that we have, can do, and also what benefit other people’s work does to aid knowledge of these places.” She furthermore states, “That is what I felt was missing, so that has filled a gap for me.” Related to me and TMF she suggests, “It’s the opposite way around . . . You are doing restoration [work] and . . . you want to know more about the way that the Nazis perpetrated the crimes that led to your need to restore in the first place.” By TMF and her university cooperating in this more extensive scientific research and restoration project within the framework of a Jewish cemetery, she feels, “we could push the boundaries on what we were doing even more to make even more of a difference.” I agree with her. Scientific research may be linked to the restoration process as a means to expand the knowledge base and fill in the gaps about the space of Jewish cemeteries in Poland, and what occurred in them.

### **Applying to Life and Practice**

The outcomes of the restoration process are varied, with most of them being applied to life and practice. During the focus group interview, Elizabeth captures a few elements entailed in the physical restoration work conducted in the Jewish cemetery in Oświęcim. She explains,

We are erecting the stones [matzevot], and we are doing this vegetation change, cutting down the vegetation, and we are finding [matzevah] fragments and relocating them, and doing our best to preserve what we can.

As a result, Elizabeth thinks it “makes my inner soul peaceful” and that by involving other people in the project, it allows them to understand that “they are doing something [good].” Consequently, she wishes, “For there to be justice in a place where there should be.” Returning this sense of justice or restoring justice to the Jewish cemeteries in Poland is one of the critical outcomes of the restoration process. Ashley

considers how restoring a Jewish cemetery impacts the lives of another group of European young people with whom she worked previously. Her desire for them primarily is that what they experience will influence other “aspects of their life, . . . whether it’s with any other, different people that they come in contact with, or at work.” Hopefully one day, she states,

[Each one] would realize that what I did ten years ago, you know, I did this cool week with a group from TMF. On Monday, I didn’t understand it, but by Friday, I understood it to a much better degree, and I saw the importance of it.

What brought Linda and I together was our mutual passions concerning the injustice of the Shoah. Linda’s perspective embraces scientific research of Shoah killing sites, while my viewpoint is concerned primarily with restoration in terms of relationships and the physical space of the Jewish cemetery in Poland. She said that her passion for restoration and her desire “to engage in dialog with Jewish communities from a Christian perspective, but also in terms of simply on a humanitarian level, actually,” were factors that led her to wish to cooperate with TMF and me. She states,

That chimed very nicely with my own sentiments about the application of my skills as an archeologist to explore the Holocaust. And the desire very much to make visible the Jewish history in the context of conflict.

She concludes that she “felt that was very much a way that we could work together.” By mutually collaborating she indicates, it would allow us to pursue restoration, which she believes to be “the end goal of the work,” so that we might enlighten the restoration process “with the archeological methods that I have available to me, as well.”

Dawn asserts that restoration begins “with doing work in the Jewish cemetery, and it’s just doing this and doing that.” However, she concludes, “It’s what the person

who is doing that. It is what they are as an individual take away from that.” From restoring the Jewish cemetery, everyone obviously will take something different away from what they are doing in the work because each person is unique. She states, “If they only take one thing away from it, then, and they pass that on to someone else, and kind of spirals, and you know, and allows it to get passed onto other people.”

As an example, she refers to a group of mostly German young people who joined our restoration and research project. As a group of 17-year-olds, they are being influenced by the work. Dawn recognizes that they will return home and share their experiences with their friends and family. Our work, she believes, “is going to have made a difference to them.” Whether these young people “recognize it or not,” she maintains,

The way they approach other things is going to be totally different, because they are going to have that enhanced level of understanding, and perhaps they might, in their own way they might tackle intolerance and hate crimes, just in a small way. But the small things do make a difference.

Linda argues that uniting people around “restoring the cemetery . . . is the direct opposite of vandalism.” Reflecting Dawn’s conclusion, she considers that the restoration work encourages these young people “to think about . . . where violence and racial hatred can lead.” She thinks that the desecration and vandalism that occurred during the Shoah is actively occurring today, which is her primary reason for being involved in this project. Through her research, she wanted to demonstrate that vandalism was not “just something that the Nazis did . . . actually, that desecration has continued since.” Additionally, she states, “And therefore, that kind of vandalism and racial hatred still exists now. And we need to do something about it before we find ourselves in a position where it escalates again into something else.”

As a researcher, she would like “to understand what motivates people to do that kind of thing, and to try and do something about it.” It is at this juncture where the work of TMF and that of her research intersect. She notes that the work of TMF and my “personal motivation” for restoring Jewish cemeteries are “hugely helping to do [restoration] by bringing together people,” who might never think to become involved in “this kind of work and think about those kinds of things.” Last, she argues, “It’s alright to put kids in a classroom and to say, ‘Don’t bully each other, don’t vandalize other people’s property.’” However, bringing young people to a Jewish cemetery contextualizes these concepts for them in such a way that “they can see it in raw form, see where it leads, and then offer them the chance to right a wrong that was done. That’s much more powerful.”

### A New Beginning

Being a young woman, “I have no memory of WWII,” Cheryl states. Even though she is a Christian and has Jewish friends with whom she interacts in her hometown, she worked for the first time with a group of Jewish descendants and their Jewish friends in Markuszów, Poland. Along with these Jewish descendants, TMF board members, and members of her church, she spent roughly a week living with them as a group under a single roof, sharing meals around a large table, and working very hard to clear, clean, and commemorate the Jewish cemetery.

Cheryl is humorous, gregarious, and atypically wise for her age. While reflecting at the end of the restoration project, she states that restoring a Jewish cemetery is “complex.” Indeed it is. Nonetheless, Cheryl concludes,

For me, restoration can also be a beginning, and that is what I have experienced with this [project]. [It] is a beginning of learning and memory, of not just the work, but of

the lives that it touched in such tragic ways. And I think that that is part of restoring, is a beginning, and then I experience, and then I have memory.

Cheryl actively represents what many young people in her generation must experience for subsequent generations to remember what occurred during the Shoah and act to prevent such hatred that can lead to genocide from happening in the future. If there is no memory, you cannot remember. In the focus group interview, one person stated, “Those people are forgotten and the fact that they are, that there is no memory of them is, is wrong.”

So for Cheryl, she sees that the essential aspects of restoring a Jewish cemetery in Poland are beginning the process of restoration, experiencing it, and then committing whatever learning to memory. For example, Cheryl relates an experience she encountered during the restoration work. She states,

Something someone said this week that stuck out to me was when we found the matzevah, and we were able to bring it, flip it over, examine it, find out the name, they muttered under their breath, “Welcome back to the life.”

What was hidden, what was forgotten beneath the layers of detritus, debris, and undergrowth, is now revealed in a new light, the light of day. At that moment, Cheryl tightly grasped the meaning of restoration, and she realized that “we are restoring it, we are bringing it back to where it can be seen.” From this realization, she states,

[The matzevah] can have a new beginning. So, now people can look at it [and] more families can come and find their family members that perhaps were forgotten, had been forgotten, and they have the opportunity to have that new beginning of learning their history.

Restoration is a process of uncovering history and connecting that history to memory. In this manner, restoration becomes a new beginning because it allows Jewish

families and individuals to reconnect with their families' past and to reestablish continuity in their identity as Jews.

Academically, Mezirow (1978) theorizes that it is possible to change what he calls the *meaning perspective*, which is the “structure of cultural assumptions within which a new experience is assimilated to, and transformed by, one’s past experience” (p. 101). He views the meaning perspective as a model of how people understand themselves and their relationships. Furthermore, Mezirow contends that “certain challenges and dilemmas of adult life” may not be resolved through an ordinary course of action such as “learning more” about the problem or “how to cope with them more effectively” (p. 101).

Resolving issues such as “life crises” requires reevaluation and development “in which familiar assumptions are challenged, and new directions and commitments are charted” (p. 101). Such a reassessment is accomplished “through critical analysis of the assumptions behind the roles we play” and possibly lead “to successive levels of self-development” (p. 101). The transformation of perspective could also guide people “to explore new life options” and “begin again” (p. 102).

### **Speaking to this Generation**

Rabbi Zimmer thinks that anyone who participates in Jewish cemetery restoration projects in Poland will gain a better “understanding of what happened in Poland” in the past, and what contemporary life in Poland is like. Subsequently, such learning opportunities give him “great hope for the future,” particularly, as it relates to young people, like Cheryl, who are of the so-called “millennial” generation. From his viewpoint, the understanding of millennials regarding WWII “is about as far away as understanding George Washington’s presidency.” Cheryl stated that she had no memory of WWII.

Rabbi Zimmer considers that, for Cheryl's generation, what occurred during the war is too abstract and remote. So for him, he thinks that finding "a way [for them] to connect and to do this work, is pretty remarkable." More importantly, he considers that making these connections with the tragic history of WWII and the Shoah is "not just going to happen in a classroom." Thus, engaging young people—millennials in Jewish cemetery restoration projects in Poland according to him, "is really a profound, prophetic, thoughtful way of teaching, I think it is going to speak to a generation that is not necessarily going to hear the lecture the old fashion way."

Theoretically, Kolb (2015) postulates that "experiential learning" is a "particular form of learning from life experience," and frequently, this type of learning is "contrasted with lecture and classroom learning" (p. xviii). Rabbi Zimmer and Kolb mirror each other's conceptual assumptions regarding experiential learning and classroom learning to some degree.

Rabbi Zimmer does not "necessarily" hold in view teaching in the classical sense but emphasizes how the experience of restoration "is going to speak to a generation." The example of Cheryl confirms his postulation, as it proposes the possibility for people, young or old, to experience history and, as Cheryl stated, "[to] have that new beginning of learning their history." Rabbi Zimmer considers this type of experiential teaching "prophetic," because he says, "It's God's work; . . . the prophets in their time had to speak up when not everybody was listening." The world, in which we live today, is filled with many competing voices and messages. For this reason, he thinks, "You can turn the volume up on the megaphone as loud as you want, but people aren't listening."



Rabbi Zimmer considers that I have “tapped into a way to have people hear, even in a way that synagogues and churches haven’t done, that schools haven’t done.” He considers the traditional approach of classroom instruction has not assisted him well in his understanding of Poland. He states, “Whatever little bit that I know or knew about Poland, I knew from whatever classroom I was setting in when somebody taught me. And, as you can see, I did not retain that much.” He considers that this experiential learning approach by engaging people in learning through restoring Jewish cemeteries in Poland is “a very different way of doing things.”

Subsequently, returning to the metaphor of the prophet, Rabbi Zimmer states, “I think [it] is going to speak to this generation in the way that the prophets spoke to their generation.” Furthermore, he states,

The prophet’s job is to stand up in their generation and to tell the people what God wants. And, they need to hear it anew in their generation because they were screwing things up royally. You’re suggesting an entirely new paradigm, that the best way to learn about our past and to build the kind of future that we want to have is to roll up our sleeves to go there and to do it. And, it’s linking theology with action.

Speaking to this generation about the Shoah requires a new approach to learning, which must link theory and practice. Therefore, it is appropriate to conclude that by engaging people in Jewish cemetery restoration projects in Poland allows us, as Kathy reasons to “touch history, but still touch lives today.” She states, “I think that when people work with us [TMF], and they learn, the touching lives just goes on and on.” Consequently, she affirms that through working with TMF, people “learn how to touch lives too,” which is “what we hope for anyone.”

## Lighting the Way

Discovering new pathways to address longstanding issues is not new. Throughout history, humanity has always embraced the process of exploration and discovery; nevertheless, the process of discovery at times pivots on the inner struggles of both men and women in terms of expressing good and evil, or darkness and light. In describing these internal human battles, Elijah refers to the Jewish concepts of “*yetzer ha-ra*, the evil inclination, [and] *yetzer ha-tov*, the good inclinations.” About these notions, he states, “Hopefully, we are on the good side more than, listening to the good more than to the bad.”

This conflict of good and evil is also expressed in popular culture in films, such as *Star Wars*, in which we encounter a battle between the dark side and the light side of the *Force*, some intergalactic, impersonal will. Christians and Jews would see this cosmic will, as being the personal will of G-d. According to Anderson (2014), theism (non-Christian and Christian) holds to the understanding that “there is a real, objective distinction between good and evil,” which leads me, as a Christian, to believe that there is “an ultimate standard of goodness in the universe” (p. 45). I view G-d as that standard.

Elijah points out that in “the reality of the world . . . there are places and people, where the bad wins out and, the good, and those who are listening to the good, are too often in the minority.” Being in the minority is not what necessarily drives the restoration of Jewish cemeteries; it is “a side benefit.” Nonetheless, he thinks, “A good number of the people, who are [involved] in this process of the cemetery restoring, are people, who I have found in The Matzevah Foundation” and beyond, such as local Polish organizations,

“who may be alone in their part of the world.” Through our cooperation, Elijah thinks that we can encourage and strengthen local Polish organizations and others in their work.

Moreover, Elijah asserts, “Supporting a minority of good people, [who are] trying to do good, is good for the minority.” At this moment, he considers that Poland is facing an important question in its political life. Politically, the question is, he asks, “Are the dark inclinations going to overcome the good inclinations?”

Lastly, Elijah reflects about how he, Jewish descendants, local Polish organizations, Baptist and Catholic volunteers, and TMF are cooperating with the civic officials of a particular city. He states,

Clearly the political authorities, the mayor, and the deputy mayor are both good [people] in trying to be open and honest about history. The church is still wrestling with ambivalence about history. The interaction with The Matzevah Foundation gives the opportunity to try and support the side of light in the world.

Szymon views his cooperation with TMF in a similar manner. He states, “I think we are going to bring some light, and that is what we are doing here now in Radecznica in 2016.” He indicates that we have brought light into darkness by cutting out and opening up “the entrance to the forest, and we saw a ray of light come in.” He continues, “[This] is what I want to do and that is what I hope the future holds,” finishing his thought he adds,

I don’t know what the future holds, I am not a prophet, but I hope this is what we can do together. Connect our lights, and bring it here where it is dark. And, actually, I’m counting on it. I’m forcing the future, but we know it’s impossible to force life to something.

He concludes, “So, I hope that it’s going to come out naturally. So, far so good, it is coming out naturally.”

## CHAPTER 5

### LEARNING TO DIALOGUE

#### **Introduction**

As detailed in the previous chapter, the findings indicate that people respond to the work of TMF in various ways. They react by developing relationships, working through issues related to reconciliation, through remembering, and the process of restoration. Where does their interaction lead? My second research question considers this matter by asking: In what ways do Jews and Christians learn how to dialogue through their cooperation within the context of the work of The Matzevah Foundation?

The second part of my findings, in this chapter, will address my second research question. Briefly stated, the results from my research interviews indicate that when people interact within the confines of the work of TMF, their interaction leads to dialogue. In this chapter, we will encounter the framework of dialogue within the parameters of TMF and its work, which is comprised of addressing proselytism, developing common ground, gaining understanding, building a sense of community, speaking about matters of faith, confronting the present past, and overcoming differences. The findings related to dialogue will reveal how dialogue is experienced and propose a potential model for dialogue.

## Dialogue

Dialogue can be a confusing term. It can mean a conversation, a verbal exchange between people, or it could be understood as spoken words or lines in a film, play, television, or radio program. Typically, dialogue is considered a discussion within a particular group of people, who may or may not be, at odds with each other. In light of discussion, the meaning of dialogue usually has in view the idea of deciding to resolve an impasse or to pursue some course of action.

Nonetheless, dialogue is genuinely not a discussion, and it is not centered on “making a decision” by ruling out options, which will lead to “closure and completion” (Isaacs, 1999, p. 45). Isaacs asserts that the root connotation of decision means to “murder the alternative” (p. 45).

On the other hand, dialogue does not rule out options. Instead, dialogue seeks to discover new possibilities and outcomes, which provide insight, and a means by which to reorder knowledge, “particularly the taken-for-granted assumptions that people bring to the table” (Isaacs, 1999, p. 45). For this reason, dialogue is “a shared inquiry, a way of thinking and reflecting together” (Isaacs, 1999, p. 9).

Freire (2000) posits that the word, dialogue, consists of “two dimensions, reflection, and action” (p. 87), and it cannot be deprived of either dimension. He reasons that both dimensions are essential to dialogue. Otherwise, dialogue would first become empty chatter (verbalism), in which “there is no transformation [of the world] without action” (p. 87), and second, if reflection is removed from praxis, dialogue would become activism, i.e., “action for action’s sake” (p. 88). Freire contends that dialogue requires reflection—what Isaacs terms “shared inquiry,” and action for dialogue to ensue. In turn,

I may interpret Freire and Isaacs's framework for dialogue as the application of theory (new possibilities) to practice.

Furthermore, Isaacs (1999) views dialogue as occurring within the context of a relationship. Freire (2000) advances a similar understanding in that "dialogue is the encounter in which the united reflection and action" of people engaging in it (p. 88). These so-called "dialoguers" are addressing "the world, which is to be transformed and humanized" (pp. 88-89). Dialogue is an encounter between people who think together and seek to change the status quo of their situation. Dialogue is not a soliloquy or a one-sided diatribe. Also, Freire believes that the foundation for dialogue is "love, humility, and faith," by which "dialogue becomes a horizontal relationship of which mutual trust . . . is a logical consequence" (p. 91).

Congruently, Donskis (2013) asserts dialogue requires not only the capacity to hear and listen but a willingness to set aside personal presumptions and "to examine one's own life" (para. 5). For Donskis, it appears that dialogue is an interchange between people framed by humility and not by arrogance, or pride. In dialogue, parties should not seek to "prevail over [their] opponent at whatever cost" (Donskis, 2013, para. 5).

Moreover, as Donskis infers, if dialogue is approached in humility, it will "arrest our aggressive and agonistic wish to prevail and dominate at the expense of someone else's dignity, not to mention the truth itself" (Donskis, 2013 para. 5). Since Friere considers dialogue to be "an act of creation, it must not serve as a crafty instrument for the domination of one person by another" (Freire, 2000, p. 89). Being understood, winning a debate, or an argument is not the outcome that dialogue should seek. Isaacs

contends that dialogue should lead people “to a greater understanding about [themselves] and each other” (Isaacs, 1999, p. 9).

In this study, when Jews and non-Jews describe their interaction, the term dialogue itself rarely appears directly in the data. Dialogue principally is implied via conversation in the context of cooperation, relationship, or friendship. Usually, dialogue is alluded to by people using terms, such as conversation, discussion, “chit-chat,” talking about life, interaction, or sharing things in common. At times, people describe their interactions with others abstractly, employing concepts, such as discovery, learning, gaining understanding, identification, feedback, or expressing emotions. As indicated earlier, changes in perceptions, or perspectives, are frequent outcomes of the encounters that Jews and Christians experience within the context of TMF.

For example, Miriam and I have known each other for several years. We have co-taught a seminar and have jointly presented to synagogues our experiences in Poland. I have learned much from her about being Jewish in the U.S., and about being a Jew of Polish descent. Regarding our conversations over the years, she considers that our discussions have affected her thinking. As a result, she rhetorically asks, “Who knows how much our discussions have changed me?”

#### Framework of Dialogue

Proselytism and liminality influence primarily the structure of dialogue in the interaction of Jews and Christians within the work of TMF. Tippett (2007) suggests, “It is possible to be a believer and a listener at the same time, to be both fervent and searching, to nurture a vital identity and to wonder at the identities of others” (locs. 174-175).

Tippet’s religious assumption imagines that it is possible for Jews and Christians to

discuss and consider differing viewpoints concerning matters of their faith. In theory, her position is conceivable; nonetheless, in practice, it is difficult to attain. A TMF board member acknowledges that our work, as a group of Christians, with the Jewish community of Poland and the U.S., is “a lot more complicated relationally.” This reality is undoubtedly due to Jewish concerns regarding Christian proselytism and to a lesser extent the Jewish perception of Christians as being perpetrators of the Shoah.

Jews and Christians have been historically divided over the identity of Jesus Christ. Jews do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as the Messiah and reject his redemptive work. Christians, over the past 2,000 years, have evangelized Jews, attempting to lead them to salvation in Jesus Christ. Many Jews perceive Christians as perpetrators, collaborators, or bystanders during the Shoah. These realities and perceptions have factored into the development of a long-standing and profoundly isolating rift in Jewish-Christian relations.

As an American Jew, Miriam has experienced this rift, as “separateness.” Bridging this gap, or closing the fissure is not easily accomplished; nonetheless, as a group of Christians, who established TMF, we desire to heal the wounds and close the breach through the work of TMF. Consequently, dialogue, as framed above in the preceding paragraphs, is the ultimate aim of TMF. How might TMF address the separateness that presently divides Jews and Christians? How might TMF bridge this gap and close the rift that exists in Jewish-Christian dialogue? Is the healing of past wounds that led to this rift even possible? How might this be accomplished? What would be the evidence that the fracture or gap is being closed? Do the findings indicate that Jews and



non-Jews are learning to dialogue? Finally, within the context of TMF, what is the evidence that Jews and Christians are dialoguing?

As previously detailed, Dawn affirms that “the Holocaust [not only] changed Poland and Europe, but [changed] people’s outlook on things.” Nowhere in the data, does anyone specifically state anything in their comments regarding Christian involvement in the Shoah. When people explicitly referred to the Shoah or Holocaust, it generally was in terms of addressing its present realities, more so, than its past precursors.

Recalling what Dawn stated beforehand, “Sometimes people struggle with [the Shoah] in drawing a parallel between what is currently happening and how learning from the Holocaust, and what happened here [in Poland] and at other places [in Europe].” Nevertheless, with regards to the Shoah, the specter of Christian perpetrators lurks in the shadows of the minds of many Jews. To be sure, the literature lends credence to their general perspective of Christians, primarily of European origins. The Shoah occurred in Europe, where at the time nearly 90% of Europeans considered themselves to be Christians, and more so this was true, in Germany, where “95% of Germans were baptized, taxpaying members of an established Christian church” (Waller, 2007, p. 140).

Furthermore, Waller (2007) argues that “the fusion of religious belief systems with ethnic, national, and political identities” provides people with the “theological justifications for ‘us-them’ thinking by constricting the churches’ universe of moral obligation” (p. 141). For the institutional church in Christian Germany and Europe, the implications were principally to maintain its status quo position and influence in society. Essentially, this meant in Germany that the institutional church did not choose

“justice”—doing the right thing by their neighbors, the Jews, but instead chose to do what was politically pragmatic, or expedient for the Nazi Party, and the State of Germany.

The political and moral choices of the institutional church in the run-up to the Shoah allowed the Jews to become marginalized and remain “entirely outside the realm of moral obligation for perpetrators” (Waller, 2007, p. 149). Waller concludes that “ultimately, the product of such mythologies and ideologies” define the institutional Christian church culture, as “us” and “them,” which leads to victims being excommunicated and removed “from the perpetrators’ moral universe” (p. 143).

Subsequently, such an ideology made it easy for the German people to allow their Jewish neighbors to be led away to concentration camps in Germany or elsewhere in Europe. For the remainder of Europe, as this ideological plague infected its environs through the advance of the German army, citizens of occupied countries faced a similar choice under extreme conditions—they faced questions of survival or death. In light of such a moral dilemma in the Nazi-occupied countries of Europe, many people chose to stand idly and became bystanders. Some people decided to become collaborators, while few people elected to become rescuers.

In the end through military force, fear, and coercion, the Third Reich achieved its ultimate objective of eliminating the Jews of Europe through their ghetto system via starvation, disease, and execution, through the actions of their *Einsatzgruppen* via mass shootings, and ultimately through their industrial installations of mass murder—the so-called “Death Camps,” which they established in occupied Poland.

Most importantly, James E. Waller (2007) concludes that this type of ideology, or mentality of “us” and “them,” leads to what he terms as “moral exclusion” (p. 143).

Michael Sells (2003) indicates that religious ideologies “have traditionally been strong at promoting an interior identity in opposition to the religious other than in affirming identity in affirmation of the other” (p. 329). When moral exclusion is anchored in such a theological premise of not affirming “the other,” Waller contends it could lead to “disastrous consequences” (2007, p. 143).

Helen Fein (1979) contends,

A church holding out the possibility of *conversion to all* (emphasis added) must assume a common humanity, and therefore may not sanction unlimited violence. But a doctrine that assumes people do not belong to a common species knows no limits inhibiting the magnitude of permissible crime (p. 30).

Essentially, Fein maintains that Christian compassion should embrace the whole of humanity and be positively inclined toward acting justly when injustice arises; otherwise, a moral catastrophe may result. From Fein’s assertion, two tangential aspects emerge that stand out to me as being principally crucial in Jewish-Christian relations, especially with regards to TMF. Although these two features do not appear expressly in the data, they do loiter in the background of Jewish-Christian interaction, and thereby they must be acknowledged.

First, “Christianity following the Shoah, even in Germany, attempted to pick up and continue as though no rupture had occurred [in their interaction] and no transformation was required” (Karpen, 2002, p. 139). Christians have not collectively come to terms with the Shoah and the role of the institutional church in its horrific events. Second, Jews are distinctively aware of this fact, and from their experience, whenever Christians attempt any interaction with them, they fear these efforts as being potentially proselytism. If not addressed, both of these features subversively influence Jewish-

Christian relations and any potential efforts toward dialogue. For this reason, I have led TMF to pursue reconciliation and to abstain from proselytism.

### **Addressing Proselytism**

The data clearly details how reconciliation is experienced in the interaction of Jews and non-Jews involved in the work of TMF. As indicated earlier, the data, however, does not broadly reflect how proselytism influences the work of TMF. What is proselytism? Is it possible to listen and explore the religious views of another person, as Tippet suggests? Can dialogue be an encounter between people who think together, explore new vistas, and seek to change the status quo of their relationship? In this section, I will consider the matter of proselytism and then address how proselytism factors into Jewish-Christian dialogue within the context of TMF.

#### Defining proselytism

Proselytism is a problematic term and is not easily defined. According to Bickley (2015) customarily, “the word . . . meant the attempt to persuade someone to change their religion;” however, he claims contemporary interpretations of the meaning of proselytism have “come to imply improperly forcing, bribing or taking advantage of vulnerabilities in the effort to recruit new religious adherents” (p. 9). Tosi (2015) and Nicastro (1994) ostensibly reflect these pejorative understandings of proselytism. Tosi associates proselytism “with the change of one denominational loyalty to another through questionable means” (Tosi, 2015, p. 31). While, Nicastro defines proselytism as “aggressive targeting and winning of converts from their (recognized) church [or religious group] to one’s own, especially through improper means” (Nicastro Jr, 1994, p. 226).

Consequently, Uzzell (2004) considers that for many individuals, who specialize in human rights and international law, proselytism has come “to mean any attempt by any religious believer to win converts from other religions or from irreligion” (p. 15). This type of understanding is expressed by the U.S. State Department regarding its “annual country reports on international religious freedom. Intentionally or not,” he explains, “this usage [of the word, proselytism] gives to all missionary activities a color of fanatical sectarianism” (p. 15).

Moreover, Uzzell points out that many voices, such as the intellectual relativists, are criticizing proselytism and advocating for “religion-free zones” to exist in society as they do in the public school system (p. 15). In such a system he goes further and states,

[R]eligious believers must scrupulously refrain from ‘offending’ unbelievers (though there is no reciprocal obligation for unbelievers to refrain from what used to be called blasphemy). In effect, the relativists seek selective protectionism in the marketplace of ideas while continuing to depict themselves as defenders of robust intellectual freedom.

According to Uzzell (2004), “proselytism has become the world’s most overused religious term and is most often invoked by those who ultimately oppose all forms of Christian evangelism” (p. 16). Bert B. Beach (1999) emphasizes the fact that proselytism is an imprecise term contending that it is an “equivocal term, rife with misapplications;” accordingly, it should be considered as “improper evangelism” (p. 66). He proposed a more favorable concept embracing the “principles of proper dissemination of religion and belief” (p. 69).

Thiessen (2014) defines proselytism as “the deliberate attempt of a person or organization, through communication, to bring about the conversion of another person or a group of persons, where conversion is understood to involve a change of a person’s belief, behavior, identity, and belonging” (p. 11). Thiessen, furthermore, describes

“proselytizing in a neutral way, which then allows for the possibility of ethical and unethical ways to proselytize” (p. 13). Therefore Thiessen, only views proselytism negatively, when it is practiced unethically. Likewise, Thiessen views proselytism and evangelism interchangeably and defines these terms as meaning “any efforts at religious influence or persuasion” (Thiessen, 2013, p. 223). Lastly, he asserts that these terms may be “applied to non-religious domains like commercial advertising” (Thiessen, 2013, p. 223).

Stone (2018) suggests that Thiessen seeks to justify the exercise of proselytism “against objections” and asserts that “at its core, his book (*The Ethics of Evangelism*) is about the ethics of persuasion” (p. 16). Stone similarly views proselytizing as “the attempt to convert others to one’s views, philosophy, political outlook, or religious faith” (p. 16). He agrees with Thiessen’s conclusion that when viewed within such a frame of reference, proselytism “is not necessarily unethical” (pp. 16-17). Stone concludes, “There are ethical and unethical ways to sell any product, change someone’s mind, persuade another person, or subscribe followers” (p. 17). Nonetheless, Stone does not believe it is proper to “conflate evangelism with proselytization or to understand evangelism as an attempt to secure converts” (p. 17).

It is beyond the scope of this investigation to resolve the disparities in how scholars understand the nuanced meanings of proselytism and evangelism. Nevertheless, Stone interestingly crystalizes and illuminates the essential difference between these two terms. He proposes, “[T]he practice of evangelism is not guided by the aim of conversion, where conversion is . . . something to be secured through various tactics (even if one might show how those tactics are ethical)” (p. 17). Instead, he claims,

“[Evangelism] is . . . guided by the aim of faithful witness” (p. 17). I will consider the meaning of this phrase, “faithful witness,” and its implications in the section, “Reframing Proselytism in the Public Sphere.”

Fundamentally, proselytism is result orientated, or outcome-based. Its objective is the conversion of a person from one worldview, philosophy, brand, denomination, religion, or irreligion to another. Proselytism is “secured through various tactics,” as Stone proposes. According to Thiessen, proselytism may be practiced ethically or unethically; however, its methodology depends on persuasion. Scholars, such as Tosi and Nicastro, pejoratively argue that proselytism relies upon coercion employing “questionable” or “improper means.”

It seems, therefore, logical to conclude that proselytism, i.e., seeking to persuade someone to change their mind—to convert from one product, or view to another, is not problematic in the realm of commercial advertising, political, or philosophical discussions. On the other hand, however, it seems to me that the issue of religious proselytism, i.e., seeking religious converts, is centered on “the dissemination of religion and beliefs.” It would appear that speaking about matters of faith is out of bounds or off-limits in the public discourse of ideas. How can this be in a world where the majority of its inhabitants consider themselves religious? How can religious free zones exist to the exclusion of specific truths, beliefs, and convictions?

Within the framework of inter-religious dialogue, it is relevant at this juncture to contemplate a statement made by Doudou Diène at a conference on “Proselytism and Religious Freedom,” organized in Madrid, Spain in May 1999. At this conference, Diène shared an apropos African adage: “In the forest, while the branches are fighting each

other, the roots are embracing each other;” he concludes, “Do we want to focus on the external differences or the internal similarities” (cited in, The International Religious Liberty Association, 1999, para. 11)?

### Historical origins of proselytism

By and large, the debate about proselytism is centered on contemporary praxis and does not consider its origins historically. Simply understood, proselytism means seeking to make converts. What is a convert, and where did the term originate? What does conversion mean? Where and when did proselytism emerge in religious practice? These three questions seem to be pertinent, and therefore, may assist us to reframe the discussion of proselytism.

What is a convert? A religious convert usually is understood to be a proselyte. The Oxford English Dictionary defines proselyte as “one who has come over from one opinion, belief, creed, or party to another; a convert.” (cited in, Thiessen, 2014, p. 9). Nonetheless, the origins of the word, proselyte, are found in biblical Hebrew. According to Jacobs and Hirsch (1906), the word, *ger*, in the Septuagint designates, “a convert from one religion to another. The original meaning of the Hebrew is involved in some doubt” (cited in, JewishEncyclopedia.com, 2011, para. 1). Without going into great detail in tracing the etymology of *ger*/proselyte, suffice it to say, that it characteristically carries the meaning of a stranger, outsider, foreigner, alien, wander, or someone, who has come over.

Commonly in the Tanakh (Old Testament), *ger* describes non-Jewish people—Gentiles, who were living in the midst of Jews, or who choose to settle among the Jews in the land of Israel. Subsequently, these foreigners or Gentiles became incorporated into



the landscape of the Nation of Israel, and in time, their numbers grew. Many of these strangers became proselytes, i.e., converts to the worship of the One True G-d of Israel. From Easton (1897), we learn that at some point, the rabbis determined that there were two types of religious proselytes in their midst: “proselytes of righteousness” and “proselytes of the gate” (p. 781).

Moreover, Easton recounts, “The ‘proselytes of the gate’ (half proselytes),” according to the rabbis, “were not required to be circumcised nor to comply with the Mosaic ceremonial law. They were bound only to conform to the so-called seven precepts of Noah” (p. 781). While the “proselytes of righteousness” were “religious or devout proselytes,” and “were bound to all the doctrines and precepts of the Jewish economy, and were members of the synagogue in full communion” (p. 781). In the New Testament, the term proselyte only appears four times and generally designates “‘devout men,’ or men ‘fearing God,’ or ‘worshipping God’” (p. 781).

What does conversion mean? It is evident from the preceding discussion and in the account of Scripture that Gentiles were converting, becoming worshipers of G-d. Once again, Levertoff (1915) notes a description in Nehemiah 10:28 “of those who ‘separated themselves from the peoples of the lands unto the law of God’” (p. 2468). And in Isaiah 56:3, he cites “the foreigner that hath joined himself to Yahweh,” which he concludes, is “the only and exact description of a proselyte proper in the Old Testament” (p. 2468). What is exceptional in these two accounts is that they describe conversion, i.e., individuals making a conscious choice to separate themselves from one religious belief system and unite themselves to another, which in this case was the worship of the One

True G-d of Israel. The reality of such a dynamic transformation in thought, belief, and practice of a person living during this era is astounding.

Where and when did making converts, i.e., proselytism, emerge in religious practice? Nowhere in the Tanakh do we encounter an account or a description of proselytism. No methodology of praxis is evident in the biblical narrative. Subsequently, Levertoff (1915) argues that in antiquity a significant number of Gentiles came to believe in the Hebrew G-d; nonetheless, “it did not belong to the economy of Old Testament religion to spread the knowledge of God directly among the Gentiles (the Book of Jonah is an exception to this)” (p. 2468). Levertoff concomitantly asserts that “there was certainly no active propagandism” (p. 2468) evident in the praxis of the Jews regarding Gentile converts.

Briefly stated, propagandism means to propagate, or make widely and systematically known a set of doctrines, teachings, or beliefs ("Propagandism," n.d.; "Propagate," n.d.). Propaganda, or the actual set of doctrines, teachings, or beliefs, could be unfavorably viewed, since propaganda itself may be understood as advancing a biased view of particular concepts. Nevertheless, propaganda can be understood positively as advocating, communicating, or defending one's cause ("Propaganda," n.d.), which could also be understood as apologetics, i.e., serving to justify or defend formally, such views ("Apologetic," n.d.).

Levertoff's (1915) conclusion that Jews were not engaged in “active propagandism” is inconsistent with the extant evidence from the Hellenistic and Roman periods regarding the propagation of Jewish mission and teaching. Religious Jews did engage in apologetics and propagated their beliefs to the non-Jewish world in which they

lived. Thom Wolf (2010a) advocates this position and maintains that scholars, such as Derwacter in 1930, Collins in 2000, and Dickson in 2003, determined that the Jewish “Diaspora literature does indeed point to a threefold apologetic thrust [to the Gentile world]” (p. 129). Additionally, Wolf stipulates that in 1922, Andrew Heffern introduced “the three-topic outline that framed the [Jewish] argument spiritually, morally, and intellectually, and drove the Diaspora conversation practically” (p. 129).

Regarding the Jewish apologists of the Hellenistic period, Wolf concludes that Heffern’s essential argument is that they “called their non-Jewish neighbors (a) to worship God, (b) to walk worthy, and (c) to come to the one God now” (p. 129). The implication of Wolf’s assertions indicates that Jews were indeed engaged in “active propagandism” and propagating, i.e., advancing their religious beliefs, values, and teachings to the Gentile world around them. Consequently, Gentiles were becoming believers of the Hebrew G-d, and the number of converts/proselytes grew in the Diaspora synagogues.

As a result, the rabbinical leadership of the Diaspora synagogues developed a teaching pattern that was practical and functional, which enabled them to incorporate and instruct Gentile converts/proselytes. Wolf notes that in 1940, Carrington reminded us that “initiation, instruction, and education are aspects of one process in the primitive culture” (cited in, Wolf, 2010a, p. 52). Therefore, Gentile converts/proselytes were being assimilated into the synagogues.

Furthermore, Heffren proposed that this threefold “system of Jewish mission teaching,” or what might be termed the rabbinical diaspora pattern, became “the basis of the successful Hellenistic Jewish propaganda from the synagogues scattered throughout

the Roman Empire in the two centuries preceding Paul's mission" (cited in, Wolf, 2010a, p. 130). Consequently, Wolf concludes, "This 'three necessary things' approach was based on the Scriptures, appealed to catechisms, and conscience to clarify how to walk uprightly, and was supported by the eschatological warning" (p. 130).

In the landscape of the great, ancient empires of Babylon, Egypt, Persia, Greece, and Rome, Jews lived among pagans, dispersed among them like salt sprinkled across an ice-covered road. Religious belief was pluralistic and diverse in worshiping a plethora of gods; polytheism indeed was the mode of belief. For the most part, these host empires hated and disparaged the Jewish people and their monotheistic religious beliefs, practices, and traditions. Despite this reality, the distinctiveness of the Jewish faith and "its lofty, austere and spiritual religious aspirations and conceptions became known to the pagan world" (Levertoff, 1915, p. 2468). The mere presence of Jews and their distinctive beliefs and practices among these empires "exercised a profound attraction upon many souls that were deeply dissatisfied with contemporary religions" (Levertoff, 1915, p. 2468).

Thiessen (2014) rightly recognizes that in Isaiah 49:6, G-d called Israel to be "a light for the Gentiles," and as such, their mission, he emphasizes, was to uphold "the good" and call "the nations to return to what is just and moral" (p. 11). He considers their "vocation" to be an expression of "social mission" and views their mission as being analogous to "the social mission" of other religions (p. 11). Thiessen questions the relationship of social mission to proselytizing and concludes that they are distinctly different from each other, which indeed they are. Nevertheless, he argues, "[A]s an expression of social mission," humanitarian aid "can lead to proselytizing and conversion" (p. 11). Linking social mission with proselytism may be common practice

today, but such praxis was not the norm during the era, when G-d commanded the Jews, in Deuteronomy 15:11, “to be openhanded toward your brothers and toward the poor and the needy in your land.”

Levertoff (1915) traces the etymology of *ger/proselyte* and chronicles, in the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah up until the time following the Babylonian Exile, the praxis of the Jews regarding the phenomena of Gentiles coming to believe in the G-d of Israel. He concludes, “Direct proselytism did not begin till about a century later” (p. 2468), i.e., sometime after the Babylonian Exile. Consequently, Jews directly began to proselytize Gentiles, roughly a hundred years after the Exile, and certainly sometime before the period of Jesus Christ.

By the time of Jesus Christ, winning proselytes/converts was a common practice among some Jewish sects, principally the Pharisees. Thomson (1915) indicates that the Pharisees generally displayed “arrogance toward other Jews,” who “were not Puritans like them” in their observance of the Law (p. 2364). According to Levertoff (1915), in Matthew 23:15, Jesus criticizes “the proselytizing zeal of the Pharisees,” and recognizes “the pernicious influence, which they exerted on their converts“ (p. 2468).

#### Proselytism and matters of conscience

One crucial aspect of advancing in our discussion of proselytism is the historical notion of a proselyte. As noted beforehand, the moral life and religious truths of the Jewish faith were evident in the ancient societies of Rome, Persia, and Babylon. People were drawn to this monotheistic faith in the midst of the prevalent, polytheistic religious practices of the era. In this period, these truth-seekers chose to convert of their own accord, becoming proselytes and worshipers of the G-d of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Until sometime before Christ, people were not cajoled, coerced, or compelled to convert. Instead, conversion was a free will choice, meaning people were free to change their minds and belief systems according to their conscience or convictions.

In a world that appears to be increasingly secular, the topic of religion is not irrelevant. It is vital. Even though some may argue religious belief is declining, the fact remains, however, that the majority of the global population claims to be religious. So much so, that findings from a 2012 WIN-Gallup comprehensive survey conducted in 57 countries around the globe indicate that “59% of the world said that they think of themselves as [a] religious person, 23% think of themselves as not religious, whereas 13% think of themselves as convinced atheists” (Gilani, 2012, p. 3). Additionally, since 2005, the poll reveals, “religiosity drops by 9%, while atheism rises by 3%” (Gilani, 2012, p. 6). The poll attributes this shift in religiosity mostly to “[people] not drifting from their faith, but claiming to be ‘not religious’ while remaining within the faith” (Gilani, 2012, p. 6).

It is essential to keep in mind the tension that exists between the social nature of religion and matters of conscience; they are not the same in the public sphere. Societies are comprised of diverse groups of people who have distinct worldviews and belief systems. Therefore, it is important to recognize today that in a global community, religious diversity unquestionably is an integral part of daily life. For example, by its very nature, America is a country comprised of diverse religious groups. In his inaugural address, President Barak Obama (2009) echoed this reality when he declared, “For we know that our patchwork heritage is a strength, not a weakness” (para. 21). Moreover, he

asserts, “We are a nation of Christians and Muslims, Jews and Hindus—and non-believers” (para. 21).

The United States of America is unique in history due to its long-standing identity as a country established by those seeking religious freedom. Nonetheless, the reality is that even in colonial America, many people, such as the Baptist preacher, Isaac Backus, opposed the imposed uniformity and authority of the State-supported Church present in Colonial America. People like Backus relentlessly pursued religious liberty, against the backdrop of Eighteenth-Century Colonialism and the American Revolution.

In such a restricted and invariable religious environment, Backus raised the matter of public religion in the face of individual conscience and freedom. He asserted, “In Christ’s kingdom, each one has equal right to judge for himself” (McLoughlin, 1967, p. ix). As a Baptist minister, Backus believed that an individual should be free to decide to follow or not to follow Jesus Christ. The government, or anyone else for that matter, could not enforce this decision upon any person. Despite years of frustrating encounters with the “Standing Order of New England,” or the State Church, this statement reflects Backus’ optimism and passion for “individual conscience” and his idealistic vision for America (McLoughlin, 1967, p. ix). It also reveals the essence of the conflict between freedom “of individual conscience” and “the compulsory power of the State” to enforce the edicts of the Church (McLoughlin, 1967, p. x).

The ultimate question that Backus and others of his day contemplated is: “Who or what is the true source of spiritual authority? Is it the Church, the State, or perhaps the Individual?” Backus championed the individual’s right to make their own decision during a most crucial era in the history of religious freedom in America.

In the scholarly treatment of proselytism, the impetus of the research, which I encountered, focused chiefly on the legitimacy (or lack thereof) of religious persuasion aimed at making converts by whatever means, whether ethical or not. It seems scholars, like Thiessen, place more weight on religious freedom and the rights of individuals to proselytize, rather than the placing their emphasis on “the basic human right to follow one’s conscience relative to religious belief and expression” (The International Religious Liberty Association, 1999, para. 1). Thiessen (2013) does raise this matter of individual choice. He states, “The freedom to make choices is central to the dignity of persons” (p. 228). Nonetheless, he does not argue for the individual’s freedom of conscience. Instead, he justifies proselytism by stating, “Ethical proselytizing will, therefore, respect the freedom of persons” (p. 228).

In the matter at hand regarding proselytism, the main issue to keep in view is that every person has the right to change their mind and make decisions regarding their beliefs and convictions. This reality, however, does not guarantee the right of anyone to proselytize another person, i.e., to influence or compel another person to change their religious beliefs. It seems to me that the academic literature misses the mark when it comes to scrutinizing proselytism from the perspective of individual conscience and the individual’s right to choose what they wish to believe.

#### Reframing proselytism in the public sphere

We live in a diverse world full of different people, ideas, ways to do things, and beliefs. Hauser (1998) argues that public opinion forms within “a public sphere, a discursive space in which individuals and groups congregate to discuss matters of mutual interest and, where possible, to reach a common judgment” (p. 86). Additionally, he



postulates that within these public spheres, “society deliberates about normative standards and even develops new frameworks for expressing and evaluating social reality (p. 86). In discursive spaces, we can learn and grow collectively as societies.

Characteristically in the charged environment of contemporary, collective discourse, tolerance is championed in the public sphere. Correspondingly, some people maintain that “in an increasingly secular society, proselytism in public environments is deeply inappropriate—a form of incivility” (Bickley, 2015, p. 9). Thiessen (2013) reminds us that “the traditional concept of tolerance meant only ‘to endure, to put up with’ (from the Latin *tolerare*)” (pp. 234-235). Instead of enduring differences, conventional thinking today requires the so-called tolerant person fully to accept and agree with differing views, opinions, and beliefs.

Moreover, Thiessen (2013) asserts that “to disagree with someone is to be intolerant” (p. 235). He emphasizes that the norm “for tolerance today is mutual acceptance of each other’s ideas as equally valid” (p. 235). Pluralism as an ideology or philosophy demands that every view must be “accepted as legitimate and endorsed as right for the person holding them” (Cooper, 2006, p. 110). The philosophy of pluralism, along with the contemporary understanding of tolerance, produce in essence a dogma or become just as dogmatic as any other belief system claiming to have the absolute truth.

Not all religious perspectives are the same. For interaction within the public or private sphere, one of the main factors for dialogue is accepting people and allowing them to voice their views. Listening does not mean that we are endorsing their viewpoints, opinions, practices, or beliefs. Moral norms exist. We may still maintain moral convictions. Universal moral values exist across cultures. Stenger (2006) sustains

this viewpoint and states that even across diverse cultures and beliefs, humanity agrees “on a common set of moral standards;” even though differences are evident, he concludes that “universal norms seem to exist” (p. 2).

Thiessen (2013) suggests, “Respect for persons is more important than fighting over a disagreement about ideas” (p. 235). Similarly, Tippett (2007) reasons,

There is a profound difference between hearing someone say this is the truth, and hearing someone say this is my truth. You can disagree with another person’s opinions; you can disagree with his doctrines; you can’t disagree with his experience (loc. 1369-1371).

Additionally, Tippett (2007) asserts that contemporary culture “tends to define religion in terms of what its adherents ‘believe,’” which she considers as being “a very Protestant Christian approach” (loc. 1457-1459). She believes that Islam “is not primarily a religion of beliefs but of practices, of piety woven into the fabric of daily individual and communal life” (loc. 1457-1459). In other words, religious faith is more than a matter of beliefs but concerns how beliefs are applied to daily life.

Stone (2018) previously introduced the concept of “faithful witness” (p. 17). This terminology commonly carries a religious meaning and describes a believer who proclaims the gospel, i.e., the story of Jesus Christ. The word, gospel, originates from the Greek word *εὐαγγέλιον/evangelion*; the word means “good news.” For Stone and many Christians, a faithful witness tells the “good news.” Turning once more to Tippett (2007), who argues, “Our public life needs moral vocabulary like this as much as it needs sophisticated vocabulary for political, economic, and military analysis” (loc. 1911-1912).

A “faithful witness” may well carry a different connotation, as it is comprised of two words: faithful and witness. Usually, in criminal investigations, trials, or legal proceedings, a witness tells the truth about what he or she observes, knows, or

experiences concerning a particular event or situation. The word, faithful, means being loyal, true to the facts of what occurred. A faithful witness could be someone, therefore, who speaks the truth, to what they know to be true about their experience.

Tippett (2007) affirms that a relationship frames “most religious virtue,” such as “practical love in families and communities, and care for the suffering and the stranger beyond the bounds of one’s own identity” (loc. 175-178). She maintains that “these qualities of religion” should not be removed from the public sphere and restrict “our public conversation about all of the important issues before us;” instead, she proclaims, “They should reframe it” (loc. 175-178).

Diène wisely asks, “Do we want to focus on the external differences or the internal similarities” (cited in, The International Religious Liberty Association, 1999, para. 11)? In the discursive spaces of life, disagreements will emerge, but people matter more than opinions. Thiessen (2013) reminds us of this reality and likewise argues, “Error has no rights, but people do” (p. 235). Respect of persons is more important than being right. Respect of persons, coupled with listening to one another, and finding common ground, are vital skills and are crucial in laying the groundwork for dialogue.

#### Application to practice

The Matzevah Foundation is not a church, a church-based ministry, or a faith-based organization (FBO). TMF is a non-profit corporation incorporated in Georgia (USA) and recognized by the IRS as a public charity. Therefore, the civic task of TMF is community service, and its work is a social mission directed toward teaching about the Shoah and caring for and restoring Jewish cemeteries desecrated in WWII and frequently vandalized today across Europe. Second, TMF works to preserve Jewish heritage and the

memory of Jews, who are primarily of Polish origins. Nonetheless, TMF was established by a group of Christians, and as such, we operate the organization based on Christian and Jewish beliefs and values. We act justly in the present moment and speak into the moral vacuum created during the run-up to the Shoah and the subsequent events of WWII.

Consequently, we are distinctly aware of the gulf that separates Jews and Christians and labor to bridge the chasm through our service. Since proselytism plays a role in Jewish-Christian dialogue, it must be acknowledged in the work of TMF. Board members, Christian volunteers, and partners of TMF are cognizant that, as an organization, and as a group of individual Christians, we cannot and will not proselytize. We do not seek to persuade or influence Jews, or anyone else to convert to Christianity. Conversion is a matter of conscience and is based on the right of every person to make decisions and change their minds regarding their beliefs and convictions.

On the other hand, as Christians, we do not deny Christ, hide, or ignore our Christian identity. For me, anytime I meet someone—whether Jew or non-Jew, for the first time, I distinctly convey my status as a Christian, and even though I no longer serve in a church ministry role officially, I also state my credentials as being an ordained Baptist minister. Collectively, we realize that as a group of Christians who lead the work of TMF, and who interact with both Jews and non-Jews in our work, we must be genuinely transparent in our religious identity, beliefs, and our ethical practices.

Subsequently, I researched and wrote a code of ethics for TMF, which the board of directors considered and approved in 2012. In the paragraph regarding dignity in outside relations, the TMF Code of Ethics states (Reece, 2012, p. 33),

As a public charity established by a group of Christians to serve the global Jewish community, The Matzevah Foundation must be mindful of the Holocaust, or the

Shoah, and its impact on Jews and particularly on Jews of Polish descent. Therefore, the Officers and Agents of TMF will not, nor will they seek to proselytize Jews. Instead, as Christians, we seek to open a dialogue with the Jewish community towards reconciliation. We honor the Jews as the root of everything that we know about God, and for this reason, the motivation for our work is that of loving-kindness and love for neighbor.

Irrespective of the intent, whenever a Christian interacts with a Jew, from the Jewish perspective, there is the question of proselytism. Subsequently, a Jewish person may be suspicious or skeptical as to why a Christian is approaching them. As a Christian, gaining credibility and trust is an embedded issue in building relationships and establishing dialogue with the Jewish community.

For example, several years ago, I met with a local Jewish leader in Atlanta. Although I came to him highly regarded due to a local rabbi's endorsement, I encountered suspicion. I met with this leader for an hour, and we discussed the work of TMF, its origins, current status, and plans. When he learned that Baptists were involved in restoring Jewish cemeteries in Poland, he wondered, "What's the catch?" My explanation of our work clarified everything for him as there is no catch, but merely a desire to serve and speak to the injustice of the Shoah.

Frequently, in my work in the U.S. with the Jewish community, I come across such caution or reserve, which is understandable. For instance, a few years ago, when I initially approached another local rabbi about my work, he said, "I always ask, 'What's the catch? Where's the hook?' Because so often, people come in [to the synagogue] wanting something of me, or from me that I just can't deliver." However concerning me, when I approached him about cooperating with TMF, he said, "But I was able to dismiss that [notion] very quickly [with you], and I realized that your primary goal was a relationship and . . . doing this work together."

Along with the board of directors of TMF, I sincerely desire to build relationships, seek dialogue, and work with members of the Jewish community to care for and restore Jewish cemeteries in Poland. We wish to bring Jew and Christian together in restoring Jewish cemeteries, as a means to open dialogue and work toward reconciliation.

In light of these considerations, Allen, a TMF board member remarks,

I think that Christians, who work with or interact with the work of TMF . . . I think that they will gain a better understanding of just the impact of the Holocaust upon our Jewish brothers and sisters, upon that people group.”

For him, as a Christian, he is humbled by the events of the Shoah, and he thinks that

“anyone, who is involved in the work, will see . . . has to see that.” Continuing he states,

I can’t speak for a Jewish person, as I’m not one, but I would say they will see a group of Christians who are not interested in conversion to Christianity as an answer or a means for the work in which they’re doing. I think that they will see [a] group of people, who just love them, who aren’t interested in trying to change them, that will accept them for the way they are, and that will try to find common ground in the God that we both believe in.

Allen reflects how love or loving-kindness—care for others empowers the interaction of Jew and Christian working with each other in a Jewish cemetery restoration project. Living out this love for others is an integral aspect of TMF and frames its mission.

To some Jews, it is a refreshing change in how Jews and Christians may relate and interact with each other. Miriam, a Jewish woman, exemplifies this statement and describes her interaction with me and my work in leading TMF. She states,

I’m seeing a different part of Christianity. I’m seeing what I believe; I don’t want to sound presumptuous, real Christianity. [It] is more what Jesus, as a prophet, his words. You are living them more than the Christianity that I’ve seen in this country and lived within this country.

When considering our interaction within the context of TMF, she says, “I think that’s probably what I have learned and what has most impacted me, . . . [is] the fact that

you are actually doing something that reflects the words of Jesus.” From her Jewish perspective, she understands that the words of Jesus are “the basis of Christianity,” and with regards to our interaction, she confesses, “I usually don’t see that [in my experience with Christians], and I will add that it’s also nice not to be proselytized.”

### **Developing Common Ground**

The destruction of Jewish life and culture across Europe, particularly in Poland, created a space—a physical and cultural vacuum, resulting in as some term it, “the absence of presence.” Bell (2017) asserts that for “philosophers like Deleuze and Derrida, the terms of absence and presence have lost their binary distinction. Instead, absence can be thought of as a kind of presence and presence as a kind of absence” (para. 7).

Accordingly, we may understand that the Jewish people were absent, but their presence lingered, like glimmers of light, in physical spaces, cultural influences, and memories.

The lingering presence the Jewish people creates, as Diana Pinto (1996) postulates, a “Jewish space inside each European nation with a significant history of Jewish life” (p. 6).

Many Poles today in Poland are seeking to recover and preserve such a Jewish space and its associated cultural heritage so that the memory of Jewish life will not be lost to history. According to the Chief Rabbi of Poland, Michael Schudrich (2007), “One can find serious groups of Poles in almost every Polish city who feel an obligation to preserve Jewish memory in their town” (p. 139). A few of these groups he considers to be “effective and proactive,” while “others are well intentioned but produce no real results” (p. 139). Nonetheless, he concludes, “In either case, there are Poles who feel compelled to save Jewish memory and the Jewish contribution to Poland” (p. 139).

Rabbi Baum acknowledges the importance of “recovering Jewish space in these Polish cities and towns” because, in his understanding, it “forces some kind of dialogue to happen.” Despite his assertion, a question arises regarding “a Jewish space in a Polish city or town.” He asks, “Is it a separate space, is it [an] integral space? Is it part of a greater whole? Or, is it just . . . outside our boundaries?” He reasons, “The direction is more and more that this is a Polish space—a Polish-Jewish space, but Polish, as well.” He thinks that both Jews and “Poles have something to gain here, and something of value.” This consideration seems to him to be the case. Likewise, he further states,

On the one hand, it is a strange thing because it is about [the] Jews of the past. It’s not about Jews of the present, because almost always Jews of the present, who are part of any of this [recovery] process are not from Poland.

Undoubtedly, the recovery or the restoration of these empty spaces present opportunities for Jews and Poles to dialogue and begin the process of reconciling this fracture of the past, which alienates both parties in the present.

Finding common ground is a crucial aspect of dialogue. It is possible to find common ground for dialogue, even if people differ religiously, ideologically, or culturally. In 2004, a Polish woman of Jewish descent suggested to me one day that I should visit a Jewish cemetery, where I was working. As a Baptist minister and an outsider to Polish history and culture, this was a strange suggestion. Why was a Jewish cemetery important to this woman? And why should it matter to me?

After researching Jewish cemeteries in Poland and in light of the Shoah, I came to understand that the space of the Jewish cemetery presented an opportunity to establish common ground for dialogue between Jews and Christians. Rabbi Baum states, “[The Jewish cemetery has] created a space for us to interact and to create a project, to realize a



project together.” The space of the Jewish cemetery provides validity and creates a liminal space in which Jews and Christians may interact. Liminal space defines the area between Jew and Christian, allowing them to meet in a third space—a liminal space between them, in which they may mutually cooperate.

Academically, Franks and Meteyard (2007) posit that liminality is derived from the Latin word for threshold; it is “the state of being betwixt and between where the old world has been left behind, but we have not yet arrived at what is to come” (p. 215). The Jewish cemetery is a transformative space in which dialogue may develop more freely concerning critical issues regarding the nature of Jewish and Christian interaction. The main impetus of the work of TMF is to open dialogue between Jew and Christian. Dialogue is more than just an exchange of information among people. For this reason, it “is not simply synonymous with ‘communication.’ For dialogue to take place, there must be a genuine hearing of the Other” (Kessler, 2013, pp. 52-53), which develop in a space between them, a third space.

This third space or liminal space is the physical space of the Jewish cemetery, and the work itself is liminality, which is the social framework that allows the interaction of Jews and Christians. Both the work and the location of the work are encountered in the liminal space of the Jewish cemetery in Poland.

Nic Beech (2011) reasons that social contexts, i.e., cooperatively working in a Jewish cemetery, “frame the possibilities that people have for creating and recognizing meaning in their interactions” (p. 290). This supposition is a critically important consideration in my work in leading TMF to build relationships or forge bonds with Jews and others. Caring for and restoring a Polish-Jewish cemetery provides an opportunity for

people to interact, and it gives validity to or a reason for their interaction. In the course of cleaning and clearing a Jewish cemetery, Ashley, a TMF board member, delineated that people working together have an opportunity to converse about the work and their mutual interest in the work. As she reflected upon what has brought people together in the work of TMF, she remarks, “It’s not our faith that [brings] us together really; it’s the . . . cemetery work . . . that is our basis . . . of that relationship.”

Moreover, Ashley explains that “the relationships that we [TMF] have are just as important as the work that we do in the cemetery.” Likewise, she clarifies her views about her interactions with Jews in the context of this third space—a Jewish cemetery by describing a discussion that she had on one occasion with Szymon, a Jewish man, with whom we have worked for many years. She states,

That whole moment [of our interaction] was because of our relationship through Matzevah [TMF]. There is no other reason on earth that he would have been with us that night had it not been for The Matzevah [Foundation]. If it had just been [with] my church or group of my friends from America coming over to work in Poland, there would be no reason for him to be there. So, the relationship that Matzevah [TMF] has with him in his office of work is the reason that we have that relationship.

The work in the Jewish cemetery and the personal relationships formed as a part of the work are essential for both Jews and Christians involved in the work of TMF. Ashley believes that our interaction with Szymon through working in a Jewish cemetery allows him to be “invested [in us] just like we are invested in him.”

### **Gaining Understanding**

Other than the State of Israel, Jews live as a minority among many other religious groups across the globe. Growing up in the U.S., Miriam was the “token Jew” in her elementary school, “who was called upon to talk about Hanukkah and light the candles.”

When the Christmas season arrived at her elementary school each year, she says, “We sang Christmas carols in French [class].” Later in life, she wondered, “Why did I do that? I just felt like it was forced on me . . . I had no choice in this matter in hearing the Christmas music and . . . I didn’t like it.”

One of the significant aspects of dialogue is gaining reciprocal understanding. Shady and Larson (2010) point to the work of Martin Buber, who was a theistic existentialist and educational theorist. His concepts of *I-Thou* and *I-It* distinguishes “between the two ways a person relates to reality. The *I-It* reflects the exchange of a human being with objective reality; the *I-Thou* represents a relationship in which “a subject encounters a subject” (cited in, Sire, 2009, p. 134). The latter is a personal encounter between subjects.

Moreover, Shady and Larson (2010) consider Buber’s model of dialogue, which describes dialogue as a process. According to them, Buber’s dialogue model allows a person to come to understand the position of another person, “while at the same time remaining rooted” in their point of view (p. 82). They furthermore assert that Buber maintained that inclusion connects both the “interpersonal boundaries with the intellectual boundaries” (Shady & Larson, 2010, p. 82). In essence, they conclude, what Buber’s model does is to advocate “a shared reality where all partners in the dialogue come to understand each other’s position, even if they do not entirely agree with it” (Shady & Larson, 2010, p. 83). Consequently, it appears that according to Shady and Larson, in Buber’s model of dialogue, an expected outcome of such dialogue, is gaining mutual understanding.

Miriam reflects upon how she has gained understanding throughout our dialogue. When we initially met several years ago, we discussed the origins of the work of TMF. As a Baptist minister, I shared my understanding of a few biblical concepts and principles, which applied to my work, as a Christian, who was caring for and restoring Jewish cemeteries in Poland. We also discussed various streams of Christianity with which she was unfamiliar. About these conversations, she states, “So, based on our interaction . . . you have helped me understand . . . well, certainly the majority of [Christianity in] this country, or Christianity anyway [as] the basis of this country.”

Miriam also recognizes though my ability to “quote the Old Testament and are able to [quote], . . . Isaiah this and Jeremiah this, . . . but the fact that you can quote, make those quotes connects me.” Conversely, if I had focused on the New Testament, she states, “[It] would keep us a little more still distant, because I can’t relate to that, and I don’t know anything about the New Testament.” She additionally states, “But the fact that you are able to quote the basis of Judaism to me that means something.” Finally, she considers that she has learned that we share “more in common than differences.”

In conclusion, she states,

I feel like you come from a purity of heart, and that’s what connects with me. So, the cultural differences already there, but what I’ve learned is that the values are the same, and that helps us connect.

Ashley reflects about an email exchange that she had with Ruth, a Jewish woman, with whom she was interacting following a Jewish cemetery project in Poland. In their interactions, Ashley recounts what they discussed working together in the cemetery, what they had been doing since returning home to the U.S., and what was going on in their lives. Ashley asked about Ruth’s synagogue, and she tells Ashley that she can watch their

recent services online via their synagogue’s website. Ashley visited the site and downloaded one of the sermons, and she shares with Ruth, her reflections about an address that she downloaded and read. In a follow-up email, Ashley quotes a paragraph from the sermon, in which Rabbi Rona Shapiro (2015) states,

My friends described signs they saw for tours of old Jewish cemeteries—come, experience the haunting quiet of the old Jewish cemetery—as if the legacy of dead Jews, their devastated and abandoned cemeteries, their defaced graves, was something mystical instead of something shameful. As if it was romantic that all that was left of Jewish life in these small villages were dead Jews (p. 4).

Ashley has worked in numerous Jewish cemeteries in Poland over the years. In her response to Ruth, Ashley states, “Touring [a Jewish cemetery] just didn’t feel right to me on some levels.” Ashley reflects further and connects her thoughts to the work of TMF and explains to Ruth that her desire is “to continue to gain an understanding and appreciation for the lives of those who are buried there.”

Reflecting more deeply, Ashley describes her response to seeing similar tour groups in other Jewish cemeteries in Poland. “I cannot judge their motivation or the hearts of the people in that touring group,” she states. Nonetheless, she considers that she has to trust that someone in one of those tour groups “is seeing more than what is presented by their tour guide, more than the bullet point facts from a brochure.” Additionally, Ashley writes, “As a Christian, I’m already an outsider to the Jewish culture and especially the Polish-Jewish history.” Hence, she states,

I always pray that the way I work and represent our work, and my faith is respectful and honoring to not only those buried there but also to the Jewish faith as a whole. I never want my work, and the work of our organization, to be routine, calculated, scripted, and kept at a distance like taking a tour of a Jewish cemetery.

Ashley reflects that in her work with TMF is more than a “bullet point” from a brochure. Consequently, she cannot be a dispassionate, a distant, or an unengaged

observer. She cares deeply about the work of TMF and desires to learn and grow in her understanding of it. Moreover, she wants to serve and do the work “for the right reason. Whether that’s serving the souls that are buried there or those who are working with us.” Ultimately, as a Christian, she recognizes that God has called her to serve others. In her understanding, all Christians serve in some capacity, but she thinks “we have to be obedient to what God places in our hearts to do . . . helping the sick, giving money to a ministry, mentoring a student, or working in a Jewish cemetery.”

### **Building a Sense of Community**

Not every Jewish cemetery restoration project that TMF facilitates in Poland is the same. Each one is unique. One of the goals that Samuel and I established for the Jewish cemetery restoration project in Markuszów was to bring these two diverse groups of people together and from the outset to build a sense of community. Other than living, eating, and working together throughout a week, which in itself was tough at times and complicated, we also added group activities that would bring the group together. For example, we planned excursions for the group, such as touring the concentration and death camp of Majdanek, and daily debriefings following each workday.

Additionally, we took an afternoon off so that we could visit a Jewish synagogue and then a museum. As a part of the afternoon, we became tourists for a bit in the Old Town of Lublin, and then we gathered for a special meal in one of the restaurants in the Old Town. The last night we were together, I conducted a focus group interview with a select group of Jewish and Christian volunteers. One question we considered was what brought the team together. Cheryl immediately states, “I am going to bring up the bus ride. It was last night, correct?” The bus ride was a unique and spontaneous experience.

On our return trip home to Markuszów, we were all sitting in the bus, and for whatever reason, someone in the group, maybe Martha, began singing. And other people joined in and started singing with her.

Most of the tunes were a couple of Broadway standards, while a few were some old gospel songs. Not everyone knew the words, but everyone participated by humming along or singing what they knew. Cheryl continues to describe the experience. She states, “But just, we all, it was like one big happy family. [like] when I would go to camp in the summer, and you are singing along the songs, and someone throws out one that it seems like only a few people know, and then see Martha stand up and just sing it out.” Samuel echoes Cheryl’s conclusion enthusiastically, and adds, “Yeah, that was cool.” Faith chimes in and says, “I mean, just bonding over music and laughter, and” . . . Cheryl finishes her sentence, “Having a good time.” Martha captures and summarizes the experience for this blended group of Jews and Christians. She clears her throat and speaks,

To me, [that] was just wonderful. You hear very rarely of people of different faiths and different backgrounds coming together in such a fun and happy-go-lucky way. It was so great. It was a perfect way to end the night after spending the day together.

She concludes, “It really solidified, I think, the reason why we, at least the reason why we are working together. We are working together to do something together.” She believes that we accomplished our goals for the work, but along the way, we became a “family.” For that reason, she thinks, “We were celebrating it.”

### **Speaking about Matters of Faith**

In racial interactions, Singleton and Hays (2008) advise that participants engaged in group discussions to “speak [their] truth” and point out that “a courageous

conversation requires that participants be honest about their thoughts, feelings, and opinions” (p. 21). Furthermore, the notion of speaking truth intersects well with a Jewish concept termed *Dabru Emet*, which means “speak the truth to one another” (Steinfelds, 2000, para. 2).

Tippett (2007) states, “Religion never ceased to matter for most people in most cultures around the world. Only northern Europe and North America became less overtly religious in the course of the twentieth century” (loc. 203). Religion matters and cannot be entirely avoided when people interact. Irrespective of faith, cultural traditions, or lack thereof, matters of belief will express themselves in dialogue across the spectrum of religious groups. Although vitally important, TMF is not seeking to advance inter-faith dialogue; nonetheless, when Christians and Jews interact with each other within the framework of a Jewish cemetery restoration project in Poland, matters of faith arise in their conversations from time to time.

As Samuel previously indicated, “Most of my Christian friends [and] I, don’t talk about religion.” However, he subsequently emphasized that in terms of what we are doing together in a Jewish cemetery, “faith and religious identity has experience, and how one lives it, its core to your daily life.” He points out that most of the people in his Jewish group do not “talk about God that much.” Furthermore, he states,

That doesn’t mean we don’t think about it or about what our responsibilities are, and you obviously talk about it more. And I love that. Again, I love that you feel the comfort, and I enjoy that.”

For TMF, the Markuszów project was the first time that we brought together a significant number of Jewish descendants (eleven altogether) and Christians (seven collectively) to work with each other in a Jewish cemetery. Although local Polish



volunteers participated in the project, they did not live with us, as the group did under a single roof. Living conditions were tight, with people sharing bedrooms and three shared bathrooms. We also ate our morning and evening meals around a large communal table.

When considering who we were as a group, Faith observes, “We were all from America, so we had that in common.” Additionally, she states that there were no linguistic barriers within the group, but “we were from different parts [of America], north and south, respectively.” Pausing and considering her thought for a moment, she then states,

I think obviously the biggest difference would be Jew and Gentile. And honestly, I believe that it has been handled—just embraced, really . . . I wouldn’t say handled. It has been embraced . . . the differences. Our church group has a devotion every morning, and many [people from the Jewish group] have enjoyed that, as well, and joined that, as well. And when saying blessing for supper, its English and Hebrew, its Jewish and Gentile prayer.

In our interactions, Faith continues, “We have been willing and able to ask questions with one another.” For example, she refers to a conversation one evening that they had with Martha, as a group of roommates, where she educated the group about being Jewish. Faith says that she and others have also interacted with each other, have asked many questions, and have had many discussions occur over the week during the project. From her perspective, she states that those in the Jewish descendant’s group “are open to hearing our questions and to educating us on everything that is involved in being a practicing Jew.” Conversely, individuals in the Jewish group also asked questions of the individual Christians, such as, “what is it like being a Baptist? Do you sing a lot? And [here among us] you can observe, we sing a lot, and we eat a lot, you know.” Martha adds, “We appreciate our differences and our similarities.”

When considering our interaction, Rabbi Baum admits, “[The] cultural differences haven’t been so much for me.” Indeed there are differences religiously in beliefs and values; notwithstanding, he considers that these differences are not so great. He states, “So we don’t talk about Jesus,” and subsequently comments, “Ok. That seems to be the general rule when Jews and [Christians interact].” When he participates in international conferences with Christians and Jews, he states,

We can discuss everything up until this point, [which] is basically Jesus. We’re not going to say that he is the Son of God, and you’re not going to say He’s just a nice guy. So, Ok. So we’ll drop it.

Given our interactions, he declares, “In terms of values, they’re pretty similar.” Generally, beyond us in the broader sphere of Jewish and Christian relations, he considers that “there is not a lot of place for conflict. That’s probably one of the most challenging.” Rabbi Baum pauses and reflects upon what one of his rabbinical instructors taught him; we should be in a post-triumphal stage now, “where it is no longer about being right.”

Rabbi Baum believes that “this process started very much with Vatican II, and I think there are a lot of people, who would it rather not be that way, and who are trying to push it back.” Mostly he considers their motives to be “personal or political” and having in view “some kind of gain.” Furthermore, he states, “I wouldn’t say personal but . . . maybe this is one of the initial difficulties of Jews working with non-Jews, is to admit that really we do share a lot of core values.”

When I initially approached Rabbi Zimmer about cooperating in Jewish cemetery restoration in Poland, he states, “I didn’t feel like that you were trying to push a religious agenda upon me.” Instead, he realized that what I am doing in my work with TMF “came

from [my] deep-seated religious values.” He concludes, “But you wanted to work with me, with my deep-seated religious values.” Consequently, we could work together and express these respective values. “To me,” he says, “that is a really beautiful thing, and it doesn’t happen that often.” Dialogue for Rabbi Zimmer is about faith in action. He states,

Jews and Christians, each with differences and commonalities, but approaching the work [of TMF] from a deep place of faith that is coming from, you know, a sacred tradition; that is Holy; that it’s sacred, and then we can come together.

Jews and Christians may have different traditions and viewpoints about Scripture, but we share a common concern for humanity. As such, he concludes, “we can come together for an action that expresses both of our faiths.” Hence, he believes that we can work together to care for and restore these abandoned and decaying Jewish cemeteries in Poland and thereby, “do God’s work together.”

Moreover, he says, “I see myself acting out my Judaism in the relationship [with you] and in the work that you do.” Lastly, he thinks that people, who genuinely become involved in the work of TMF, like a group of volunteers, who cooperate in a project, “will end up with a few things.” He thinks that they will gain “a deeper appreciation of their own faith, a deeper appreciation of each other’s faith, [and] a much better understanding of what happened in Poland.” Then he thinks that these volunteers will come to understand, “what’s happening in Poland, now, or not happening in Poland, now, and why repairing cemeteries is a sacred calling.”

### **Confronting the Present Past**

In caring for and restoring Jewish cemeteries in Poland, the work of TMF hinges upon acting in the present, while responding to the devastating impact of the past tragedies regarding the Shoah. It cannot be assumed that Jewish descendants, local Poles,

volunteers, or anyone involved in the work of TMF, does not have personal thoughts and feelings about the tragic events and the aftermath of the Shoah.

For this reason, issues, such as family trauma, unresolved anger, hatred, despair, or guilt, may find expression in the present, and consequently may be encountered. Although such issues are rarely expressed openly, facing these delicate emotional, or psychological concerns, is difficult for practitioners, like me, and those involved in the work of TMF. Even though I am a trained minister, generally, those who are engaged in the work of TMF, lack such specific training in counseling. Nonetheless, skills such as empathy, the ability to listen and understand, as well as how to respond to the issue, if at all, can be learned. Dialogue, regarding such traumatic matters, does occur in the course of the work; however, how it is encountered or expressed, is varied.

Faith is someone who serves on our board, who is what I would call a “feeler.” In her personal life, she bears the scars of conflict and strife, but despite such personal trauma, she has learned to empathize and care genuinely for other people. She has walked alongside me in our work with TMF for nearly seven years. Along the way, I have seen her struggle and weep over the tragedy of the Shoah, as a Christian woman. Even though she is not Jewish, she feels the trauma of it and considers that her journey in learning to deal with this trauma has been for her “very painful.”

For Faith, she thinks that she has “come to realize the predominate” theme in her “journey is separation.” She characterizes, such separation, as being separated “from your loved ones,” who are placed in “a cattle car, and [they] are taken to some strange place, and in [their] head, [they] are thinking, ‘Oh, this is going to be better. We are going to be okay.’” This what “you tell your children,” she says.

Furthermore, Faith imagines that once the family arrives at their unknown, final destination, she declares, “[They] are snatched away from each other, and [then], there is the worst, most profound separation.” She emphasizes with the victims of the Shoah and their families. She identifies with their anguish and suffering, but also she realizes that she “cannot change” or undo what transpired.

Moreover, Faith realizes that she “cannot bring back those children or repair those relationships.” They are gone. Notwithstanding, for her, the matter of the past lingers in the present. As a Christian, how does Faith respond? What should she do? She has reflected on such questions, and during an interview, she indicates her response.

I can tenderly and lovingly work in these [Jewish] cemeteries of descendants, of [a] family, maybe, immediate family. I can do what I can to try to keep the memory alive of what existed—[the] lives that existed, parents that loved their children.

For her, she concludes, “I think a large part of my journey has been somehow maybe to struggle with it, try to repair that separation.”

Jewish descendants, whose families left Poland before WWII, or, who are the children of survivors, or, as some would say, “remained,” carry with them, at times, a great deal of family trauma. Krysińska and Lester (2006) studied second generational trauma found among the children of Shoah survivors. Their research characterized this type of trauma as “secondary” or “vicarious traumatization,” which they noted results in extended “changes in the individuals’ attitudes towards the world” and those around them (p. 147). This type of secondary trauma may, or may not, be frequently evident or appear as a feature of a TMF Jewish cemetery restoration project.

Several years ago, however, I encountered such secondary trauma, when a young Jewish woman privately expressed anger to me during a Jewish cemetery restoration

project. She was a third-generation descendant, whose ancestors were buried in the cemetery; however, her immediate family had escaped the tragedy of the Shoah. Nonetheless, she expressed her anger and resentment toward the Poles. Even though our group of volunteers was cooperating with local Poles to restore the Jewish cemetery, she had difficulty separating what the Poles were doing presently in collaborating with us from what some Poles may have done in the past.

It is understandable for some Jews to bear resentment toward specific Poles, who betrayed their neighbors or collaborated with the Nazis. However, not all Poles participated in such acts. Poles are the most numerous national group among the Righteous Among the Nations, people decorated by Israel's Yad Vashem Institute for rescuing Jews from the Holocaust" (Кєpa, 2015, para. 6).

For this young Jewish woman, the actions of a few Poles did not redeem the whole. When I encountered her anger, I realized quickly that my role was not to challenge or to correct her rage. My part was merely to allow her to express it, so I stepped back and did not pursue the matter further. In reflecting, I think that while she was involved in the project, she hit an emotional wall. She was processing much at that point in her experience. She was not happy with what had happened to her family. The anger is real, and she had to express it.

Still, I wondered if I responded appropriately. For me, dealing with such emotions is not new. I have pastoral training and some formal education in counseling; however, I am not Jewish. Engaging such intense anger due to the Shoah is new to me. I recognized that I was in uncharted waters. I wanted to learn and grow in my ability to participate in this type of honest dialogue and become a better, more competent practitioner. So, I

wrote an email to Elijah, and I addressed the anger that I encountered with him. Elijah is a Jewish psychiatrist and a friend. He was also a participant in this particular project.

Elijah advised me that when I encounter anger, I should consider doing two things. First, he suggested, “that sometimes in encountering anger, the best thing to do is to let the person express their emotions and step back.” Second, he recommended, “When the angry person is ready to engage . . . then they will engage.” I thanked Elijah for his affirmation, his “words of encouragement, and for [his] willingness to walk with me along this path of dialogue.” In his reply, he asserts, “You have chosen a challenging path in life by your work . . . . Your work with The Matzevah Foundation clearly inspires your following and all of my group, and clearly changes the world for the good.”

Elijah affirms “the difficulty of [such] dialogue” and states, “it is indeed difficult, but I have no doubt that with your gentleness, your sincerity, and your labor, you are a role model for dialogue for all.” Elijah’s response to me, as a Jew, is humbling and encouraging. To this point, I have never considered myself a role model for dialogue. I am still learning about dialogue and will continue to learn as I lead TMF.

In my response to Elijah, I wrote,

I appreciate your words of affirmation and your feedback regarding our ongoing dialogue. Yes. It is a process, an emerging one at that, and as you said, “a work in progress.” We both know that there is no handbook on how to go about dialogue.

In addition, I tell him that in working with descendants, such as him, I must examine my own beliefs, viewpoints, and re-consider my own premises. I state, “I am growing in my understanding of ‘real dialogue.’ I want those whom I lead to move in this direction, as well.”

Elijah has become for me and TMF, a friend, co-worker, and advisor. He has interceded on my behalf and that of TMF on several occasions and has actively advocated for us in an effort to resolve critical issues and advance our work. He has become, along with the organization that he leads, a valued partner with whom we cooperate. Indeed, we look forward to a fruitful future as we walk the pathway of dialogue together.

### **Overcoming Differences**

Jews and Christians, naturally, are distinctly different from each other. Many factors separate them religiously, culturally, and historically, which, as already noted, has produced a great divide between them. Overcoming these differences, and closing this gap between Jews and Christians, is the fundamental purpose of dialogue, as experienced in the work of TMF.

Miriam embodies how dialogue may overcome these differences between Jews and Christians and lead to a better understanding. As a Jew, she has experienced “many different feelings growing up Jewish in a Christian country.” Some of those feelings, she says, are positive, while others are negative. Some of what she feels, she thinks, is “just resentment, perhaps, that I was a minority.” And, she says that she had to listen to Christmas “music [every] December until I went to [live in] Israel and I didn’t have to deal with it [anymore].”

Compounding Miriam’s feelings is the fact that her “brother became a Christian.” She states, “I love him dearly, and I respect him, and I’ve learned a lot from him.” Nonetheless, in my and her interaction, as we have met with each other over the past few years, she states, “I’ve learned more about Christianity probably from you.” She characterizes what she has learned from me, or has come to understand from our



exchanges as “more positive—all positive aspects of Christianity for me that I wouldn’t have known otherwise.”

Above all else, Szymon is my friend. We have known each other for more than a decade. For me, and for my work in leading TMF, Szymon is ultimately a central reference point. Additionally, Szymon has played a critical role in my life as I developed my understanding concerning the ins and outs of Jewish-Christian relations. At the onset of our odyssey, Szymon was my teacher, who schooled me in the *Halakhah*, as it related to caring for the dead and their resting places in Poland. Later, he began to function much like a barometer reflecting to me the relative conditions of my interaction with him and other people within the structures of the Polish-Jewish life. In time, he became for me a guide, who assisted me in navigating the subtle complexities and subtexts of dialogue. Moreover, at times, he was a protector, who alerted me to danger or risks involved in my interactions with various people inside and outside the Polish-Jewish community. Through my interaction with Szymon, I came to understand the Polish-Jewish culture and eventually became to him and other Jews in Poland, an accepted outsider.

When considering our relationship, as I indicated earlier, Szymon states, “I think you are my friend. A true friend. And it’s not about cemeteries; it’s not about Judaism—just a friend.” The basis of our friendship is straightforward for him; he states, “We like each other. We don’t get on the nerves of each other, and we don’t frustrate each other. We strengthen each other.” In the end, he says, “It is, as simple as, having some sympathy for each other, and that’s what happened, really. So to build up the friendship, we needed more years.”

In the context of our working relationship, he considers me a persistent and robust leader, from whom he says, “We can learn.” Consequently, he crystallizes his understanding of what I have accomplished over the past decade in our interaction by stating,

I feel that you are reaching, where not many want to reach. You drilled yourself through a thick wall, and you are on the other side. You are inside of that environment that is traumatic, and this is what I mean by getting deeper.

Overcoming differences, navigating obstacles, and “drilling through a thick wall” of separateness, is building a bridge to span the breach of separation between Jews and Christians. All such actions require effort, persistence, and patience. Szymon concurs that in overcoming differences, “You need huge persistence and patience because people are different, and sometimes they divide. They try to evaluate, who is better, and who is worse.” He acknowledges that in my work, I have experienced such a pattern “from both sides—Baptist, [and] Jewish.”

Still, in spite of these difficulties, Szymon says, “You believe in that friendship, we can overcome these walls.” According to Szymon, I have indeed succeeded in my efforts to overcome these differences “at least with me and with a bunch of other people that are letting you enter these cemeteries, they trust you, and they believe in you.” For me, this is hugely affirming and positive. Szymon thinks that what I have achieved “is a great success.”

When I asked Szymon if these feelings about our interaction extend to anyone else in TMF, he replies, “Sure, the people I have talked about before, like Willis, like Kathy, I haven’t seen Elton for a while, but I remember he was an amazing guy. I also

liked that Polish guy, what was his name? And Ashley, she is great.” What is more, he explains,

When I meet your groups, even when they are in a bit of different constellations sometimes, you know, some people come, and others don’t, but they always seem to be very integral, they do, they go after you, they believe in you. So, I think that that leadership of yours is very inspiring, and it does strengthen the group very much.

While reflecting over the years of our relationship and what brought us together, he likewise states, “It’s just that I felt good with your group the first time.” The first time that he interacted with any volunteers, it was in 2006, when he came to lead an orientation session on Jewish burial practices and caring for Jewish cemeteries. About his first encounter, he states,

I remember. I had a piece of paper and [had] written down all the stuff I wanted to talk about . . . it was very nice to share this knowledge and [to know] that somebody wants to hear it.

Likewise, he considers that it was an exchange “between different environments,” in which “we can learn something from each other.” What was important to him was our interest in and the desire to understand the cultural, religious, and technical “rules of the cemetery” that stood behind the restoration of a Jewish cemetery in Poland. He states,

This is very nice, [and] this is also showing respect for Jews for Judaism. This is not trying to get around it or change it. This is accepting, understanding, and going forward with your project. I think this is good. It is very good.

Over the ten plus years that Szymon and I have worked with each other in Jewish cemeteries and mass grave commemorations, our religious and cultural differences have not been a factor. He states, “I never felt a difference. This is a great success. You do not shine with a difference. I don’t feel that you are different.” He acknowledges that we are different religiously, but he considers that in our work, “we are beyond religions now.”

Likewise, he adds,

And, I never feel uncomfortable or inconvenient, or I don't feel like I'm not understanding something. That's the great thing about it. That I never feel these cultural differences. Even if you speak with that different accent, you have different food; you have different traditions where you are from, I don't feel it.

Szymon states that he feels this way about our interaction, "because you and your group, you are human. It's not about baptism (sic)." It is our religious identity as Baptist Christians that compels us he believes, and for this reason, he states, "I think that's what brings you here." He continues,

If you feel that someone was hurt in the past, or someplace was hurt in the past and requires more respect and understanding of this culture, and you come, half the world, and you fly here to do this heavy work, in the summer, when you could go to Hawaii, that is something [unusual].

Hence, he reasons, "I don't feel the difference. That is the thing. That is the real truth. I know, in fact, I know we are different. But I don't feel it."

### Experience of Dialogue

What does the process of dialogue look like within the conceptual construct of TMF? The experience of Ashley provides a good illustration of how Jewish-Christian dialogue is encountered—how it appears, how it feels, as well as, how it unfolds, and functions practically in actual, on the ground interactions embedded within the work of TMF in restoring Jewish cemeteries in Poland. Initially, when she began working with me and in Jewish cemeteries in Poland, she was just a regular volunteer from a Baptist church in Tennessee. In 2007, TMF did not yet exist, and neither of us had any idea that one day it would.

Nevertheless, at the time, she came to work with me and others to clear the undergrowth in the Jewish cemetery of Otwock, Poland. As per my practice, which I have pointed out in the previous section, I invited Szymon to do a seminar for the group

of volunteers regarding the importance of the Jewish cemetery, and what the volunteers could, and could not do with regards to the work in the cemetery according to the *Halakhah*. Ashley was in that group and met Szymon for the first time.

Regarding her first encounter with Szymon, Ashley observed in her 2014 journal, when she met Szymon, “he was so serious and quiet.” Indeed, he did come across so seriously ten years ago because he was in the process of learning, who Baptists were, and about their beliefs. For him, the rift was still functionally present, and for this reason, he did not yet trust us. For Szymon and Ashley, many cultural, linguistic, and religious layers existed, which separated them.

Even though Szymon spoke English, he never conducted his seminars in English. I translated for him. He chatted with a few of the volunteers, like Ashley, but did not interact with them. He and I, at the time, were beginning to relate to one another beyond the Jewish cemetery. We shared meals in my home and elsewhere. We spent a great deal of time with each other talking and discussing the issues that we confronted in our work. Eventually, he called me his friend, which in Polish culture is a rare occurrence, but even more so for a Polish Jew. In due course, Szymon began to spend more time with the volunteer groups and started to get to know and interact with some of the volunteers, like Ashley, who were becoming more invested in restoring Jewish cemeteries.

I began this trek with Szymon in 2005 and worked with him over four years before returning with my family to the U.S. In 2008, I left Poland, not knowing when or if I would return. When saying goodbye to Szymon, he said,

In this global world, I do not see why you cannot continue your work with us in cemeteries from America. You must continue because you have entered the most difficult dialogue in the world.

Until that moment, I did not realize that I had “entered the most difficult dialogue in the world.” Szymon’s words clung to me tightly. How could I forget them? I began to carry them with me daily, and I wondered what I should do? How could I continue in this dialogue with him and the Jewish community of Polish descent?

Within two years of leaving Poland, I was meeting and discussing the possibility of establishing a non-profit with Ashley and a core group of volunteers like her, who had become intimately and passionately involved with the Jewish community of Warsaw in caring for and restoring Jewish cemeteries. We determined to establish TMF, and in December 2010, we incorporated TMF as a 501(C)(3) non-profit corporation. In April 2011, we reconnected formally with the RCC and began working with the Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage in Poland (FODZ). For a brief period, Szymon stepped away from his position at the RCC. Therefore, in 2012, when we began working in Jewish cemeteries, as TMF, he was absent from our work; nonetheless, by 2013, he returned to his position and returned to working with us once more.

In 2014, Ashley also reconnected with Szymon during a Jewish cemetery restoration project in Oświęcim, Poland. One evening following dinner, she writes in her journal, “Szymon gave a lecture with all of us on Jewish burial customs and the different types of graves he works with.” Following the seminar, the group returned to our dorm and sat down around a table and began to talk. I also sat at the table and was listening to the conversation, taking part in it, and observing their interaction. In her journal entry, Ashley states, “We covered all types of topics.” During the conversation, she noticed that Szymon was different from the first time that she encountered him. Once more in her journal, she notes, “Szymon is hilarious.” She relates this difference to him and tells him

how serious he was the first time that she met him, nearly six years ago. She writes, “He laughed.”

Aside from me, Ashley, Kathy, Jackie, and Tomek were at the table with Szymon. The group discussed what was going on in their lives. Szymon tells us why he stepped away from his work with the RCC for a season. When I later interview Tomek for this study, he shares with me his observations about the conversation that evening with Szymon. He points out that our conversation with him occurred in a much smaller group of just five people, and it “allowed closer interaction.” Tomek thinks that the small group is ideal and better than a large seminar setting because he thinks it is more intimate. Additionally, Tomek reasons that a small group facilitates more significant conversation, which for him, allows him to understand what was going on in the conversation “more clearly, and the values, and emotions [are] more apparent.”

Tomek also shares with me his thoughts about our conversation with Szymon. He recalls how he felt when he heard that Szymon needed a break from his work “because of the emotional toll.” In a way, he says, “It made [Szymon] more human.” Reflecting more deeply, he states,

I cannot imagine myself doing that [type of work] in general, like working especially on the mass graves and those things. But also seeing that there was something that . . . made it difficult for him, as well, [it] required some time to step back and look at those things from outside.

Through Tomek’s reflection of this encounter, we learn how empathy appears and how understanding grows and allows people to experience their humanity in dialogue. It is challenging to work literally with the aftermath of the Shoah. The work that we do carries with it a tremendous emotional toll. In terms of psychologically dealing with the repercussions of the Shoah, Krysińska and Lester (2006) report that secondary trauma has

been seen among “professionals working with trauma survivors” (p. 147). Also, they concluded that the transmission of the trauma “does not necessarily require direct contact with survivors [of the Shoah],” but may arise from merely “working with documents, movies, photographs and other objects connected with trauma,” which results in traumatization vicariously (p. 147).

Almost imperceptibly that evening, the dialogue shifts in tone and seriousness. “The next thing I know,” Ashley writes in her journal, “Szymon is grilling me about things.” At this point, during the conversation, I chose to be silent and become an observer. I knew intrinsically that this group of loyal and devoted TMF volunteers and board members were crossing a barrier, and entering the realm of dialogue, as I already had with Szymon many years ago. I did not know what would transpire, but I knew that I could not intervene. They were on their own.

For whatever reason, Szymon chose to focus his questions on Ashley. He asked Ashley a few passing questions about her life, such as, where she lived, where she worked, and how her work in Poland impacts her job in the U.S. Ashley answers his questions straightforwardly and tells him that she lives in Nashville, works for a Baptist denominational agency, and that she is intimately involved in her church’s life and mission. His next question was chilling.

Szymon asks Ashley, “Do you consider yourself to be a religious person?” Everyone around the table realized the serious nature of the question. They also realized that it was the first time for anyone other than me to face such a direct question from someone in the Jewish community. In her journal, Ashley later expresses her thoughts, and states, “I prayed, asking for the right things to say. I wasn’t nervous.” She also wrote



about her experience that night in an email to me in 2014. In it, she states, “[I] sensed at times that he appreciated [that] I had to think about my answers a bit, and that I didn’t just blurt out what I thought he might want to hear.” Likewise, she admits that at that moment, she became aware of “how easily” she incorporated “Christian speak” concerning what she believes and why she believes it.

Szymon asked another point-blank question: “Did the Jews crucify Jesus?” Ashley responded rather quickly by stating, “No, the Romans did.” She commented later in her email to me in 2014 that she “told him that up until a couple of years ago,” she “had never heard the phrase ‘the Jews killed Jesus,’” but during the conversation she also states that “we discussed how [other people at the table] had heard that a lot in their lives.”

The next day, I asked Ashley how she felt about the conversation. She said, “I knew that this day would come eventually. You told us to be prepared and to be ready. Last night, it was my turn to be grilled.” She shared with me that Szymon told her afterward, “He enjoyed grilling me.”

Returning once more to Ashley’s 2014 email to me, she reflects upon what she learned following our encounter with Szymon. She shares with me that she needs to be mindful of her “Christian speak,” and therefore, adjust what she is saying “depending on who I’m speaking to.” She additionally states,

Always be honest. Even if the person we are in dialogue might not agree with what we say, they will respect our honesty and openness. And if we don’t [know] the answer to a question, tell them you don’t know. . . they’ll respect that, too.

From my perspective, as an observer and a non-participant in the conversation, Szymon did not interrogate Ashley. It may have felt that way to her; nonetheless, Szymon

asked her some earnest and direct questions. These direct queries are significant and are indicative of real inquiry, which is seeking to understand. Such an honest investigation is the basis of genuine dialogue.

Early in the morning of the next day following their conversation, I drove Szymon to the train station in Kraków. Very soon, after we were on the road, he shared with me his reflections regarding the discussion. Principally, he stated that he was testing Ashley and trying to determine what kind of person she was and if she was genuine or not. He told me that in his job, he works with religious people every day and knows insincerity when he sees it. He said to me,

She did well. She gave me honest answers to my questions. You have done well preparing her, and she does not have on any blinders. She sees beyond her religious identity and her worldview and can embrace other perspectives.

A few years later, I interviewed Ashley for this case study. When I asked her about Szymon's ss questions, she does not precisely remember her responses; nevertheless, she does recall the conversation and states, "I learned a lot from, both from a Christianity side but also from the Jewish side. It took many months after that to process that [experience] and to think through and learn from [it]." She shared with me a few of her thoughts regarding what she had learned from her conversation with Szymon. She states,

I learned that he was just as curious about what I believe, as I am about what he believes and why. He was not trying to put me in a box or trying to back me into a corner about what I believe. But, I felt it was just a very healthy dialogue that challenged me, and I hope maybe that challenged him in what I believe, but I also think at the end of the day, it maybe helped him and I have a connection.

In their reflections, Ashley, Tomek, and Szymon demonstrate most prominently a few essential characteristics of dialogue.

1. Other than one-on-one interaction, the small group is an excellent vehicle for dialogue
2. The small group allows more intimacy and facilitates empathy.
3. Both Ashley and Szymon were curious about each other, which should lead to opportunities for sincere inquiry.
4. Szymon and Ashley were both able to discuss their viewpoints and beliefs and come to some understanding of each other.
5. Dialogue is challenging in a healthy way if not confrontational.
6. By discussing differences, they were able to “connect” and thereby bridge the gulf between them.
7. For everyone, who interacted in the conversation, the underpinning of the discussion is due to the liminal space of the Jewish cemetery.

According to Ashley, the foundational element of her and TMF’s relationship with Szymon and the Jewish community of Poland “is the cemetery work.” The work in the Jewish cemetery, she states, “is the common, core element” that connects Szymon, herself, and TMF. The work that TMF mutually pursues with the Jewish community regarding the Jewish cemeteries of Poland provides validity to the relationship, which, according to Ashley, is achieved through “just doing work together, just conversing together, just having conversations that are based on that work and that interest . . . that brought us together.” For this reason, the work that TMF does in the restoration of Jewish cemeteries in Poland is the basis of dialogue for Christians and Jews, who cooperate within the framework of TMF.

## Potential Model for Dialogue

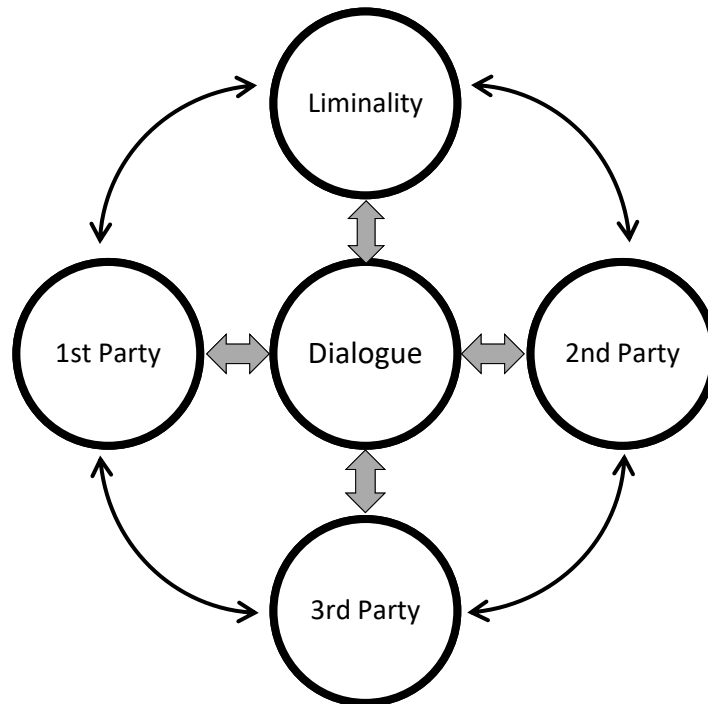
In the construct of TMF, Ashley's experience and our collective experience with Ashley and her dialogue with Szymon reveals a likely model for dialogue. At the very least, the mutual experience of dialogue that we all experienced (the Jewish and Christian parties) provide insight and a few guiding principles. Most importantly, the liminality of the Jewish cemetery and TMF's role in caring for and restoring these sites are factors in the development of dialogue between Jews and Christians. In light of these considerations, the primary components of dialogue as encountered in the work of TMF are:

1. One-to-one interaction and the development of interpersonal relationships are the fundamental building blocks of dialogue. As such, individuals learn to see other's viewpoints and perspectives, enabling mutual growth and understanding.
2. Dialogue occurring in a small group allows more intimacy to be experienced and facilitates empathy among the participants.
3. For productive dialogue to develop in a small group, the size of the small group should not exceed four or five people.
4. Honest, intellectual curiosity about the other person, or a genuine desire to learn and understand the other person, is a necessary aspect of dialogue.
5. Sincere inquiry allows those involved in genuine dialogue to consider each other's viewpoints and beliefs, allowing them to come to some understanding of each other.
6. Healthy exchange—challenges each person. Healthy dialogue is challenging, if not confrontational.

7. Dialogue is open and does not put Jewish and Christian participants in a box.
8. By discussing differences, dialogue allows Jews and Christians to “connect” and thereby bridge the gulf between them.
9. The liminal space of the Jewish cemetery provides the basis for Jews and Christians to dialogue in the context of the work of TMF.
10. The religious identity of Jews and Christians, who participate in dialogue, does not change during dialogue.

## Graphical Models of the Findings

When considering how the findings relate to one another graphically, I have summarized and condensed my findings into five graphical components as represented by liminality, the first, second, and third parties, and dialogue. I view the interaction of these components as reciprocal (see Figure 1). One of the significant findings is that relationships form as a result of people's interaction with the work of TMF. As noted previously, the relationship between two people—the first party and the second party is



*Figure 1. Reciprocity of Interaction*

not a closed system, but it is open to multiple others, who are viewed as the third party. In this dynamic, TMF functions as the third party. Corvellec (2005) declares, “The third party disturbs the intimacy of my relationship with the other and provokes me to question

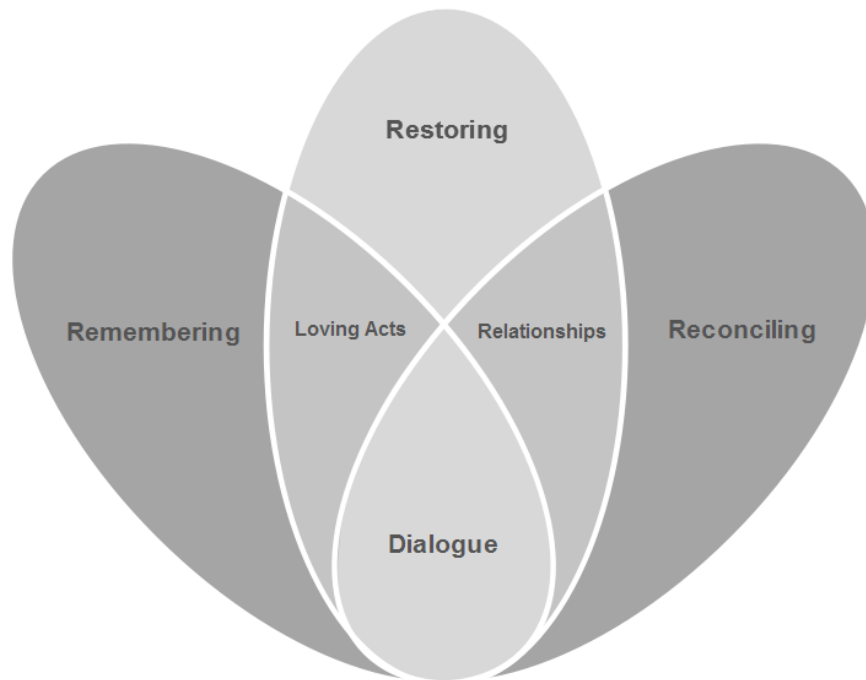
my place in the world and my responsibility toward society” (p. 18). As the third party, TMF becomes a catalytic agent that changes the dynamic of Jewish and Christian interaction, ensuring altered states, i.e., new outcomes.

The liminality of a Jewish cemetery provides a credible and valid reason for Jews and Christians to interact; however, to enter this unique, liminal space, participants in TMF Jewish cemetery restoration projects must choose to cross the threshold, and thereby leave behind old ways of thinking, and embrace the unknown of new horizons. Dialogue envisions new outcomes and possibilities and seeks to reorder knowledge, “particularly the taken-for-granted assumptions that people bring to the table” (Isaacs, 1999, p. 45).

The application of a Venn diagram to arrange the findings logically may be seen in Figure 2. In this graphical illustration of the results, we learn how the six major themes that emerged from this study form sets of data, which overlap, intersect and interrelate with each other producing a coherent explanation of what was discovered in the study. Five sets of data (remembering, restoring, reconciling, loving acts, and relationships) yielded a centralized collection of commonality expressed by the final theme, dialogue.

Herman (2015) asserts that remembering allows for “the restoration of the social order,” and it enables individual victims to experience healing (p. 1). Karpen (2002), defines reconciliation precisely as meaning “to restore [a relationship] to friendship or harmony” (p. 3). Karpen also infers a linkage between memory (remembering), caring (loving acts), and restoration. Wilkens and Sanford (2009) consider that redemption contains within it, “the basic idea of restoration” (p. 196).

Restoration is not merely about restoring or redeeming physical spaces, or their status within a particular community, but it is more so about restoring and recovering broken relationships between people, which may be considered as a form of reconciliation. We may consequently conclude that remembering, loving acts, restoring, building relationships, and reconciling within the framework of TMF indicates that genuine dialogue is possible.



*Figure 4. Intersection of Findings*



## CHAPTER 6

### FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### **Introduction**

Anti-Semitic and anti-Judaistic hatred are the foundational stones underlying Jewish-Christian conflict. Hatred of this type is exemplified in the interaction of Christian Poles and their Jewish neighbors. Historically, the Jewish and Polish relationship may be characterized as mutually exclusive, and at times tense, filled with struggle. Before WWII, Poland had the largest Jewish population in Europe, totaling approximately 3.5 million Jews.

In 1933, Hitler became Chancellor of Germany and led Nazi Germany toward war, and the historical cataclysm of the Shoah. Many people consider that anti-Semitism was the basis of the Third Reich's decision to implement the Final Solution to the Jewish Question in Poland. However, this is not the case. The Nazis strategically adopted Poland as their surrogate for "their gigantic laboratory for mass murder," solely for the reason that Poland was the home to the most significant European Jewish population (Zimmerman, 2003, p. 3).

Following "the *Erschütterung*, 'shock' of Auschwitz" (Fackenheim, 2002, para. 8), it is apparent that something within the framework of Christian theology and social consciousness needed to change. Nevertheless, nothing substantially altered in the Christian outlook. Many Christians "attempted to pick up and continue as though no

rupture had occurred, and no transformation was required” (Karpen, 2002, p. 139). The profound terrors of the Shoah, and the “break in history” it produced, justifiably led *some* Jews and Christians to realize their need for dialogue. Consequently in 1947, a group of them met formally in Seelisberg, Switzerland, so that they might mutually declare their collective anguish about the Shoah, their wish to confront anti-Semitism, and “their desire to foster stronger relationships between Jews and Christians” (International Council of Christians and Jews, 2009, p. 2).

In more recent times, Karpen (2002) states that Jewish-Christian dialogue “has become commonplace” (p. 4); nonetheless, it is still challenging. Moreover, he posits that the events of the Shoah are “exercising a powerful transforming effect not only upon Judaism but also upon Christianity” (p. 205). Broad swaths of “the Christian Church have begun a process of abandoning the teaching of contempt” and have started to discard anti-Judaistic theological teachings (p. 205). Kress (2012) views Jewish-Christian interaction as primarily improving because Christians have completely re-evaluated their “attitude toward Jews and Judaism” (para. 1). Despite these efforts, Christians and Jews remain divided and struggle to interact.

The purpose of this study was to describe the process of how acts of loving-kindness (mercy), as demonstrated and encountered through the work of The Matzevah Foundation (TMF), in caring for and restoring Jewish cemeteries in Poland, have influenced dialogue (or lack thereof) among Jews and Christians. The study explored mercy as the language of dialogue, and the organization that I lead, TMF, illustrated that dialogue. Mercy was operationalized and understood in terms of “loving acts” (Johnson,

2012, p. 127); loving acts were corroborated by humane orientation, concern for others, or compassion, charity, and altruism.

### **Research Methods**

A case study proved to be the best methodological approach for investigating the work of TMF. Through inquiry, I sought to understand how Jews and Christians respond to the work of TMF—the third space, and in what ways people learn to dialogue within the framework of the Jewish cemetery in Poland. Additionally, I wanted to determine whether or not loving acts or acts of loving-kindness influenced attitudes and created mutual bridges of understanding, which might serve as the underpinning for dialogue.

Principally, I examined the responses of people individually and corporately to open-ended questions about their experience in working with TMF in its educational initiatives and its Jewish cemetery restoration projects in Poland. I selected specific participants (and sites) primarily for this study using the criterion of Patton (2002) as to whether or not participants are “information-rich” (p. 237), and who had knowledge of, and experience in working with TMF in the U.S. or Poland. I prepared seven fundamental and open-ended interview questions, which I used in conducting individual and focus group interviews (See Individual and Focus Group Interview Protocol in Appendix E).

For my study, I chose fifteen individuals to interview, who have had interaction with the work of TMF either for the first time or over an extended period. Nine individuals have had a direct association with me, or in some capacity of my leadership of TMF. Of these nine individuals, four participants were Jewish, and five participants were Christians. I conducted two field-based focus groups interviewing eight individuals, of whom six were first-time volunteers, and two were TMF board members. In the first

focus group, I interviewed two Jews and two Christians, one of whom was a TMF board member. In the second focus group, I interviewed three primarily non-religious, first-time participants, and another TMF board member. I interviewed six men and nine women for my study. The participants in this study were religious leaders, doctors, bankers, students, writers, scientists, business people, administrators, and leaders.

### **Key Literature**

Jews and Christians may come to terms with the past trauma brought about by long-term anti-Semitism, anti-Judaism, and the Shoah through dealing with such evil today by means of “loving acts.” Johnson (2012) considers that “Scott Peck is not alone in arguing that loving acts can overcome evil” (p. 127). Peck (2012) defines love in this manner: “Love is as love does. Love is an act of will—namely, both an intention and an action. Will also implies choice” (p. 83, loc. 1078). Therefore, loving acts are actions that flow out of love or concern for others. The concept of loving acts may be academically linked to humane orientation.

Humane orientation may be defined as “the degree to which individuals in organizations or societies encourage and reward individuals for being fair, altruistic, friendly, generous, caring, and kind to others” (Javidan & Dastmalchian, 2009). Kabaskal and Bodur (2004) explain further that “this dimension is manifested in the way people treat one another and in the social programs institutionalized within each society” (p. 569). Simply stated, humane orientation is concerned with the welfare of humanity.

Baskin and Enright (2004) define forgiveness “as the willful giving up of resentment in the face of another’s (or others’) considerable injustice and responding with beneficence to the offender even though that offender has no right to the forgiver’s moral

goodness” (p. 80). Forgiveness for Jews and Christians may be difficult to realize due to Jewish views concerning the complicity of Christians during the Shoah. Despite this reality, forgiveness is theoretically possible. To this end, Baskin and Enright (2004) and other researchers have developed a model based on moving through four phases they term: uncovering, decision, work, and deepening (p. 80). Johnson (2012) reasons that their model could assist “people forgive” (p. 130) and, when combined with loving acts, may break the cycle of evil.

Karpen (2002) offers three critical theoretical insights as to how Christians *might* conceptually respond to the Shoah. First, he argues for the need for “an ethic of remembering.” Second, he maintains that there needs to be “a way to place memory [of the Shoah] closer to the heart of Christianity” (p. 205). Third, by way of inference, he provides a glimpse as to how to remember and bring the memory of the Shoah “closer to the heart of Christianity” by working “together on the task of *tikkun olam*, the repair of the world” (p. 206).

Researchers refer to space in between entities as liminal space, and the concept is denoted as liminality, which was “created by Arnold Van Gennep (1909) and Victor Turner (1959)” (Auton-Cuff & Gruenhagen, 2014, p. 2). Liminality is a concept that describes being between or in the middle of two spaces, literally in-between the two—a third space. Liminal space, or liminality, may define the space between conflict and people, or what may be termed no man’s land; this is the space of conflict, where no one wishes to enter. Richard Rohr (2003) suggests that the only escape for a person entrapped in “normalcy, the way things are,” is to enter into a “sacred space,” frequently termed *liminality* (from the Latin *limen*) (p. 155). Furthermore, Rohr reasons that in liminal

space, it is possible to encounter “all transformation” by moving “out of ‘business as usual’” and leave behind the “old world, . . . but we’re not sure of the new one yet” (p. 155).

Dialogue may be a confusing and unclear term. It is more than a conversation, and it is undoubtedly more than a discussion. It is not a debate. According to Isaacs (1999), dialogue means “a shared inquiry, a way of thinking and reflecting together” (Isaacs, 1999, p. 9). Shady and Larson (2010) point to Buber’s work in dialogue, which advocates “a shared reality where all partners in the dialogue come to understand each other’s position, even if they do not entirely agree with it” (p. 83). The vital aspect of dialogue is seeing new outcomes and the opening of the way to pursue them. Dialogue may be linked with liminal space and create the possibility of changing the status quo, or the way things are in Jewish and Christian interaction.

### **Summary of Findings**

My first research question for this study asked: How have Jews and Christians responded to the work of The Matzevah Foundation? From the interviews, observations, and other data, I discovered that Jews and Christians reacted primarily to the work of TMF by responding in five significant ways.

1. They responded by developing relationships as they cooperated in the work of TMF.
2. In terms of loving acts, they cared for Jewish cemeteries in Poland.
3. Jews and Christians remembered the Shoah and linked remembering with action to preserve the memory of Poland’s Jewish past.

4. Jews and Christians engaged in *Tikkun Olam* as they worked with each other to repair the world of forgotten Jewish resting places in Poland.

5. In practical terms, Jews and Christians experienced reconciliation by working together to care for Jewish cemeteries in Poland.

My second research question was: In what ways do Jews and Christians learn how to dialogue through their mutual interaction within the context of the work of The Matzevah Foundation? The data revealed a framework for dialogue emerging from Jewish and Christian interaction within the context of TMF. The TMF framework of Jewish-Christian dialogue consists of seven components: addressing proselytism, developing common ground, gaining understanding, building a sense of community, speaking about matters of faith, confronting the present past, and overcoming differences among them. The findings also shed light on the experience of dialogue within the realm of TMF's work and discovered a potential model for Jewish and Christian dialogue.

## **Discussion**

I will answer my two research questions by linking the findings of my study where possible to the literature; however, I will privilege the voice of the participants, as I craft the meaning and the implications of their story. For my discussion, I divided my findings into two groups based on my research questions. In the first part of the findings, I will discuss developing relationships and caring, remembering and restoring, and reconciliation. In the second group of findings, I will discuss dialogue.

### **Question 1**

How have Jews and Christians responded to the work of The Matzevah Foundation?

## **Relationships and Caring**

Jews and Christians first responded to the work of TMF by building and developing relationships by caring through loving or compassionate acts. Kessler (2013) defines dialogue in terms of a relationship and states, “dialogue begins with the individual, not with the community” (p. 53). What this means for my study is that if relationships are defined by interpersonal interaction, then relationships are a crucial factor in determining if genuine dialogue is possible among Jews and Christians interacting within the construct of TMF.

Szymon considers the work of TMF with the Jewish community as “bridge-building.” He states, “What you are doing is building a bridge to the Jews. You have no guidebook, no example to follow, but you keep at it, learning as you go.” Consequently, he declares, “We Jews should meet you halfway.” Szymon also considers the bridge-building efforts of TMF as a means to develop “inter-religious relation[ships].” He thinks that building bridges and relationships are “something that we can build together, something [with which] we can inspire each other.”

Moreover, Szymon maintains that building bridges is “about understanding each other, and finding . . . some elements that we can share.” Ultimately these shared elements become the common ground of dialogue and the underpinnings for further cooperation. Laying the groundwork for such a relationship is mutually achieved; therefore, whatever emerges is shared. For Szymon, building a relationship is “equally yours and mine . . . . It’s ours; we built it. So it’s beyond Jewish, or Baptist, or whatever, we have built a foundation [for our relationship].” This relational bridge “connects” us.



Szymon and I have built a relationship with each other that serves as a foundational element of our dialogue.

Flannery (1997) contends that Christians need to “adopt the Jewish agenda” and take a step toward reconciliation (p. 3). Christians must initiate the process of reconciliation by attempting to span the chasm between them. Building bridges leads to bridging differences and removing barriers among Jews and Christians. Rabbi Baum states, “The Matzevah [Foundation] serves as a bridge” and is “working hard,” connecting and building bonds between people. According to Tomek, TMF brings people together to work in a Jewish cemetery, and thereby connects them “on the human level” allowing them to discuss “common interests and values, music, culture, film, or those things, which [make interacting a] more personal relationship.”

Karpen (2002) infers a linkage between memory, caring, and restoration. He states that the memory of the Shoah needs to be placed “closer to the heart of Christianity” (p. 205), but does not express a means whereby to bring it closer to the Christian’s heart, other than Christian participation in Shoah commemoration ceremonies. The clear conclusion that I may draw here is that the Christian heart should care about Jews impacted by the Shoah and demonstrate their concern concretely in some manner. Additionally, Karpen argues that if Christians could understand the Shoah, then they could work together with Jews “on the task of *tikkun olam*, the repair of the world” (p. 206). What is crucial in his statements is the hint that he provides, allowing me to theoretically connect the Shoah to the heart of Christians by bringing Jews and Christians together to repair Jewish cemeteries in Poland. My findings support such a hypothesis.

Tomek maintains that Jewish cemeteries are “something that should be cared for—a memory that should be passed on [to other people].” By caring for Jewish cemeteries, he sees value in what TMF does and wishes for us to share “what we have learned about the Jewish community and the values that they have.” He wishes for this knowledge “to spread out” and to be planted “in other people’s hearts,” so that they might “be aware [of these values].” What are the Jewish values that need to be shared? Caring, compassion, or concern by committing acts of kindness (*chesed shel-emet*) as exemplified through caring for Jewish cemeteries.

Metz (1978) argues, “We Christians will never get back behind Auschwitz and, seen accurately, beyond Auschwitz only, no longer alone, but only with the victims” (para. 5). Compassion means suffering together. Metz challenges Christians to seek to understand the fracture produced through the Shoah by being compassionate, i.e., to be “with the victims” in their suffering. Subsequently, Fackenheim (2002) concludes, “Metz urges Christians, at long last, *to listen* to Jews” (para. 41). Jews and Christians can come to terms with the past trauma brought about by long-term hatred and the Shoah through “loving acts,” which is a notion that Johnson (2012) attributes to Peck (1978, 2012).

Academically, we understand this compassionate response as humane orientation. Humane orientation “is the degree to which individuals in organizations or societies encourage and reward individuals for being fair, altruistic, friendly, generous, caring, and kind to others” (Javidan & Dastmalchian, 2009).

Ashley states, “If you care for somebody, you’re going to act. If you love somebody, you’re going to act,” because, for her, she reasons, a person cannot love another person “from a distance and not have interaction.” In the same way, she asserts,

“You can’t care for something, or someone and not have interaction with them.” Peck (2012) hypothesizes that love is more than a feeling or emotion, and he considers that love is “an act of will—namely, both an intention and an action” (p. 83, loc. 1078).

Furthermore, Ashley states, “I definitely believe that we are to care about our fellow brothers and sisters.” She believes that G-d gives people “a heart for different aspects of the world” for which he desires for them to be concerned. For her, she believes that G-d desires for her to care for her family first, then “it’s my friends, and then it’s the work of [The] Matzevah [Foundation]. It’s the work of [restoring Jewish] cemeteries [in Poland].” Her interest in learning more about the Shoah and her involvement in the work of TMF has become for her she states, “part of my heart,” and has become “part of my life.” She says that not every person in her life understands her involvement in the work of TMF “because it is such a unique work, but it’s become a part of who I am. It’s a part of my identity now.”

Since relationships are dynamic exchanges among people, they grow and develop over time. Consequently, in building relationships, people may change how they understand and view each other over time in the context of their interaction. Miriam reflects upon the impact of our relationship on her. Since we first met, she states, “[I have] grown as a person as a result of knowing you, and to me, that’s part of friendships.” She emphasizes how she changed by stating, “You didn’t ask me outright, but the relationship asked me to open my ears differently, open my mind, open my way of seeing things.”

Miriam’s comments are indicative of the development of trust, along with describing elements of the experience of dialogue and transformational learning.

Additionally, her comments point toward the process of reconciliation. Edward Taylor (2007) emphasizes one of the “essential factors” found in a “transformative experience” is based upon building relationships with other people, who trust each other (p. 179); transformational learning is not abstract but a rather concrete and mutual experience. It is through these “trustful relationships” that people can engage in dialogue, discuss and share information freely, which allows them to “achieve mutual consensual understanding” (p. 179).

### **Remembering and Restoration**

When Ashley recalls the Shoah, she says, “I think of the wrongness that was done. I think of evil.” Martha remarks, “One of the great tragedies about the Holocaust,” was the instantaneous, almost complete halting of memory, and, “I think that was part of the purpose of what transpired during the Holocaust, to totally erase” the memory of Jews. The Nazis, in essence, were committing both physical and cultural genocide. Miriam mirrors this understanding and considers “what the Nazis had done.” She says, “[They were] not just destroying the communities and Jewish life, but they were trying to erase the fact that there was Jewish life by destroying the cemeteries.” Given such injustice, humanity cries out for justice—for the wrong to be made right.

Linda asserts, “To desecrate graves of people, who are no longer there to defend themselves in any way,” is an injustice and “absolutely despicable, the lowest thing you can do.” Additionally, she thinks that destroying “the memory of people, whatever religious background” they happen to be, “that’s . . . the lowest of the low.” Linda thinks that the work of TMF creates an opportunity for people to act socially and provides for them “the chance to do something” for the community, which she considers as “doing

what is right.” Elizabeth views her involvement in the work of TMF as being a part of “bringing people together in a cemetery because they know they are doing something, doing a favor, [for] somebody’s life” and for doing justice. Similarly, Allen views his motivation to be involved in the work of TMF as “seeking justice for those who can’t seek it for themselves.”

Erica Lehrer introduced the notion of Catholic Poles, who preserve Jewish memory, culture, or “space,” as “stewards” (Lehrer, 2013, p. 125), or by what she likewise termed “cultural go-betweens, or caretakers” (Lehrer, 2005, p. 136). Although these cultural stewards may be seen as interlopers or imitators by some Jews, they provide “custodial care” of Jewish culture and “hold open a place in memory” (Lehrer, 2013, p. 127). Allen characterizes TMF’s role as custodial, caring for these cemeteries on behalf of those who cannot. He states, “We [TMF] show love, and we show care by remembering those, who have passed away, who have died in that land, and whose [descendants] aren’t there to take care of them because they were brutally murdered in the Holocaust.”

Remembering and caring for Jewish cemeteries may be linked conceptually with restorative actions that not only change the physical state of Jewish cemeteries, but also transform communities, and the interaction of Jews and Christians. In basic terms, restoration is “the act of restoring to a former state or position . . . or to an unimpaired or perfect condition,” while restoring means “to bring back to the original state . . . or to a healthy or vigorous state” (Bradshaw, 1997, p. 8). Herman (2015) asserts that remembering allows for “the restoration of the social order,” and it enables individual victims to experience healing (p. 1). Karpen (2002), defines reconciliation precisely as

meaning “to restore [a relationship] to friendship or harmony” (p. 3). Wilkens and Sanford (2009) consider that redemption contains within it, “the basic idea of restoration” (p. 196). Restoration is not merely about restoring or redeeming physical spaces, or their status within a particular community, but it is more so about restoring and redeeming broken relationships between people.

Linda considers that working in a Jewish cemetery is doing “something in a restorative way,” in order “to show that there are people who do care about it.” For her, she argues that such restorative and caring actions are significant and arise from a sense of justice due to the “very raw and brutal” desecration of Jewish cemeteries. Rabbi Zimmer affirms that through pursuing justice, Jews and Christians “can come together for an action that expresses both of our faiths.” Consequently, he concludes, “And, that action is to repair these cemeteries that are falling apart, that are neglected, and to do G-d’s work together in bringing a sense of justice and wholeness and peace to our world.” His comments reflect the underlying Jewish understanding of restoration, which is encapsulated by *Tikkun Olam*.

In Judaism, the concept of *Tikkun Olam* is a Hebrew term meaning “repair of the world” (Sucharov, 2011, p. 172). *Tikkun Olam* historically has been understood in terms of restoring, restorative works, or healing; nevertheless, in contemporary times, it “has come to connote an ethical outlook by which we strive to create a better world” (Sucharov, 2011, p. 174). Also, such restorative work or repair is viewed as “a process that extends beyond the bounds of the dyadic field to include the surrounding world context” (Sucharov, 2011, p. 175). According to Pinder-Ashenden (2011), “the concept of *Tikkun Olam* surely resonates strongly with devastated souls yearning for healing and

redemption” (p. 134). The work of restoration involves repairing the broken world around us. Restoration in and of itself is a process and not a product.

Miriam contends that since TMF invests its time, money, and effort “into doing the work . . . it says that you are committed to this healing process.” Moreover, she states, “You’re not just espousing ideas of, ‘Oh, let’s kumbaya,’ and the world is going to get back together again. You’re actually doing something on the ground, which I think is a lot more meaningful.” The essential aspect of restoration is the linking of Jew and Christian in the physical space of a Jewish cemetery allowing substantial interaction. Samuel illustrates the interplay of physical and social restoration, which occurs in a Jewish cemetery in Poland.

Consequently, emotions arise, Samuel states, “[reflecting] the tension between [individual] hope (and all our hopes) that the work we were doing helps in *Tikkun Olam*.” He recognizes that restoration “is a process rather than a finished product.” He concludes, “The mutual hope is that our work brings full healing between Christian and Jew, and on an even more particular plane between Christian Poles and Jews.”

When considering the matter of restoration, Rabbi Baum asks, “Who are we healing here?” His question reflects the need to deal with the much more profound matters of restoration, not necessarily of restoring physical spaces, but that of the space between people. The Second World War and the Shoah were traumatic to both Jews and Poles; nonetheless, both groups suffered disproportionately. Navigating the suffering and the resulting trauma are along the path of restoration and must be confronted. Optimistically, he considers the pathway that Jews and Poles are on now, will assist them

“deal with the dark aspects of the war [and allow them] to recover [from] this trauma, [but it will] take much longer to be able to heal it.”

“In general,” Rabbi Baum points out, “these local communities aren’t ready yet to initiate this [healing process] on their own.” He believes that for whatever reason, local Polish communities must begin the healing process with “something small,” such as the local school going to Jewish cemetery “to clean a bit, to do something [in it].” Nevertheless, he considers, “But to do something bigger, which in general they have the ability to do, they wouldn’t think to do.”

Therefore, according to Rabbi Baum, TMF “serves first and foremost, they show that it is possible, physically it is possible” to deal with the trauma of the past and “it is also possible to join in [the work].” He thinks that if local Poles could partner with TMF and the Jewish community, then it may be possible for them to “partner with others when it comes to [their] past.” Rabbi Baum wonders, “Maybe we can find a place to accept . . . that our past isn’t one story, and the people who lived here weren’t just one people.” Samuel considers restoring Jewish cemeteries is “a very hopeful approach to something that is an impossible task, but a valuable task.”

## **Reconciliation**

In simple terms, Jews and Christians experienced reconciliation by working together as they cared for and restored Jewish cemeteries in Poland. Karpen (2002) defines reconciliation as meaning “not only ‘to restore to harmony’ but also, in the mathematical sense, ‘to account for’” (p. 9). Volf (2000) considers reconciliation to have more than a theological meaning, which most Christian theologians understand as the “reconciliation of the individual and God” (p. 162). He maintains that justice should be



understood “as a dimension of the pursuit of reconciliation, whose ultimate goal is a community of love” (p. 163). Also, he reasons that reconciliation has a vertical dimension (between G-d and humanity) and a horizontal dimension (among men and women), and concludes that without this “horizontal dimension reconciliation would simply not exist” (p. 166).

For this case study TMF, I considered that the essential meaning of reconciliation to be reconnecting and bringing together disjointed elements by gathering Jews and Christians collectively to care for and restore Jewish cemeteries in Poland. The data from the study indicates that reconciliation embraces the transformation of perspectives across a broad array of viewpoints amid participants, ranging from religious to secular, from Jew to Christian, from board member to volunteer, and from those with long-term or first-time interaction with the work of TMF.

Learning, according to Kolb (2015), may be defined as “the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience” (p. 49). Taylor (2007) emphasizes one of the “essential factors” found in a “transformative experience” is based upon building relationships with other people, who trust each other (p. 179). By giving Jews “an opportunity” to be a part of Jewish cemetery restoration projects, Miriam maintains that TMF provides the Jewish community “a chance to learn the lessons that I did . . . otherwise, they’re not going to get it.” She contends that if Jews “just go to the death camps,” it will only reinforce “our victimization.” Moreover, she continues, “I think that we thrive on the victimization and we’d like to think that we’re always the victims.”

Thus, Miriam is convinced that TMF projects offer “an opportunity for people [Jews] to grow, change, and rethink their preconceptions about Christians, Poles in Poland.” Concluding, she states, “I suppose, and obviously, if there can be better understanding and a sharing of values and see that there are Christians, who share our values, that [scenario] could have life.”

Ashley realizes that from her experiences with TMF and her interaction with Polish and Jewish people, she has developed “new views” and has had “new opportunities” and experiences “to process,” which she otherwise would not have. Furthermore, she affirms, “So, with each experience in life, something is going to change, good or bad, or just everyday experiences change you to some degree.” By having conversations during “the work that we do in Poland,” she says, “[it] will change you, if you let it—and, if you are willing to be immersed in it, and not just be a bystander.”

In a focus group, Faith reflects upon her experience working with a group of Jewish descendants during a TMF Jewish cemetery restoration project. She states, “I think, working alongside you all, has helped me see your hearts, [and it] has helped me see that we have way more similarities than we would ever have differences.” She recounts, “We have laughed, we have sweat, [and] we have been pooped.” For her, she declares that “this is an experience that I will never forget.” Szymon has learned in his interaction with TMF that it is comprised of people, who “are people of different religion, different belief, from difficult places, but they have that sweetness in them, and understanding for others, and that is when I understood that even in [the] dark you can grow a beautiful flower.”

Rabbi Baum thinks that the presence of a Jewish cemetery today in a Polish community “gives them [Poles] the ability, and hopefully forces them to, to deal with some of [the trauma of the past].” He wonders whether or not the local Polish community will ask itself “the complex question of what’s our obligation to the people who lived here? And, what is our [responsibility] and their descendants? And, what should be our relationship with their descendants, if they had any [Jewish communities in their midst]?” He believes that the process of local Polish communities beginning to work in local Jewish cemeteries facilitates coming to terms with such questions.

When TMF engages local Polish communities in its work in a Jewish cemetery, Rabbi Baum postulates, “It causes the young people to ask questions. It causes the older people to dig up memories.” He thinks that if local Poles take part physically in restoring a Jewish cemetery it “allows them also to start . . . changing their perception, opening their eyes, their perception of the history, the reality of the place.” In effect, Rabbi Baum thinks that the work of TMF becomes a type of mediator of change and allows people to consider their viewpoints and change their understanding of the Jewish space in their communities.

As a mediator furthermore, Rabbi Baum believes that TMF enables Jews and Poles to interact. For him, performing this role “is something that we, as Jews, couldn’t do. And, also the Poles couldn’t do either,” because, he states, “I think there is too much baggage on both sides—too much history.” He characterizes what TMF does as “taking action” and changing “the equation,” along with changing “the way people feel about the situation.” He says, “It shows that things can change and be changed. They are not static. And, those things can remain in certain areas unresolved.”

Poles and Jews share a collective history and have a complicated relationship with each other. Rabbi Baum characterizes the Polish-Jewish relationship as being intertwined and having “a very common fate” and “our common history seems to dictate a common future.” Even though a common past links Poles and Jews, “it seems to be something we don’t want to admit—neither side is ready to admit. And that also creates a strange tension, inability to work together.” This reality is especially true when it comes to matters of preserving Jewish heritage in general and particularly in light of Jewish cemetery preservation and restoration.

Rabbi Baum theorizes that TMF also functions as a “disinterested third party” in the interaction of the Polish and Jewish communities. Rabbi Baum links his understanding of how TMF functions to Levinas’ theory of the Third Party. According to Corvellec (2005), the third party may be understood as “the other of the other, who stands in front of me” (p. 18). Garcia (2012) states, “it’s wrong to interpret his [Levinas] philosophy as if there are only two people” (para. 7), who are interacting with each other. According to Garcia, Levinas distinguishes “between the closed society of two people,” who stand opposite of each other, “and the open society, who are open to all see” (para. 7). The relationship between two people is not a closed system, but it is open to multiple others, who are viewed as the third party. Corvellec (2005) declares, “The third party disturbs the intimacy of my relationship with the other and provokes me to question my place in the world and my responsibility toward society” (p. 18).

Rabbi Baum thinks that “by having a disinterested third party” involved in working in a local Jewish cemetery, it provides an opportunity for the local community to acknowledge that the work “had to be done . . . that work like this should continue.”

Moreover, he says that when the local community realizes that they “have a partner, something in [their] perspective on another [person] changes.”

## Question 2

In what ways have Jews and Christians learned to dialogue through their mutual interaction within the context of the work of The Matzevah Foundation?

### **Dialogue**

As an American Jew, Miriam has experienced the rift between Jews and Christians, as “separateness.” Bridging this gap, or closing the fissure between Jews and Christians, is not easily accomplished; nonetheless, as a group of Christians, who established TMF, we desire to heal the wounds and close the breach through the work of TMF. Therefore, dialogue is a crucial aspect of our work, and one of the primary foci of this study. Do the findings indicate that Jews and Christians are learning to dialogue, or are they even dialoguing at all?

According to Isaacs (1999), dialogue is not a discussion, and it is not centered on “making a decision” by ruling out options that lead to “closure and completion” (p. 45). Isaacs proposes that dialogue seeks to discover new outcomes and possibilities, which provide insight, and a means by which to reorder knowledge, “particularly the taken-for-granted assumptions that people bring to the table” (p. 45). Likewise, Isaacs views dialogue as “a shared inquiry, a way of thinking and reflecting together” (p. 9), and subsequently, he regards dialogue as occurring in terms of a relationship with someone else. He contends that dialogue is not about our “effort to make [that person] understand us;” it is about people coming “to a greater understanding about [themselves] and each other” (p. 9).

What makes dialogue really work? Kessler (2013) indicates that “dialogue begins with the individual, not with the community” (p. 53). Donskis (2013) emphasizes that dialogue requires not only the capacity to hear and listen but a willingness to set aside personal presumptions and “to examine one’s own life” (para. 5). It appears that dialogue is an interchange framed by humility, and not by arrogance, or pride. In dialogue, parties should not seek to “prevail over [their] opponent at whatever cost” (Donskis, 2013, para. 5). Moreover, as Donskis infers, if dialogue is approached in humility, it will “arrest our aggressive and agonistic wish to prevail, and dominate at the expense of someone else’s dignity, not to mention the truth itself” (para. 5).

What is needed in order for genuine dialogue to occur? Theoretically, dialogue should be possible among Jews and Christians as an interchange between people. Dialogue should be probable during the interaction of Jews and Christians while working with each other in caring for Jewish cemeteries in Poland. Therefore, as we have seen thus far in my discussion of the findings, Jews and Christians respond to the work of TMF by forming relationships and caring, remembering, restoring, and reconciling. Do these responses of Jews and Christians to the work of TMF factor into whether or not dialogue occurs?

The findings from the study, and what the literature has to say about what I discovered, indicate that these responses facilitate dialogue in at least four ways. First, as discussed previously, developing relationships is a crucial factor in dialogue. Second, loving acts or compassionate acts serve as a means to bridge the chasm between Jew and Christian and allow them to stand together through caring for Jewish cemeteries in Poland. Third, through remembering and restorative acts, or *Tikkun Olam*, Jews and

Christians may experience reconciliation by mutually cooperating in caring for and restoring Jewish cemeteries in Poland. Fourth, it is in the context of the Jewish cemeteries of Poland, where relationships are built, compassion is expressed, and remembering, restoring, and reconciling occurs. Jews and Christians find themselves in an emerging space, a third space in which dialogue is possible. Each person, who chooses to enter this unknown territory, must decide what they leave behind, and embrace the discovery of something uniquely new.

Researchers refer to this space in between entities as liminal space, and they term the concept as liminality. Auton-Cuff and Gruenhagen (2014) attribute the creation and the development of the term, liminality, to Arnold Van Gennep (1909) and Victor Turner (1959) (p. 2). Franks and Meteyard (2007) maintain that liminality is “the state of being betwixt and between where the old world has been left behind, but we have not yet arrived at what is to come” (p. 215). Thus, liminality allows for Jews and Christians to encounter “a genuine hearing of the Other” (Kessler, 2013, p. 53), and experience the reality of dialogue.

In terms of the work of TMF, what are the essential elements of dialogue? The findings point to seven critical components of dialogue in the context of TMF. These elements are: (a) addressing proselytism, (b) developing common ground, (c) gaining understanding, (d) building a sense of community, (e) speaking about matters of faith, (f) confronting the present past, and (g) overcoming differences. In my discussion, I will briefly consider each of these elements; nonetheless, the reader may refer to Chapter 5 for a more extensive discussion of these findings.

1. Addressing proselytism – Christians must address proselytism if they wish to pursue dialogue with Jews. In Chapter 5, I thoroughly address and discuss the matter of proselytism. Suffice it to say for this discussion that proselytism is a problematic term and is not easily defined. According to Bickley (2015) customarily, “the word . . . meant the attempt to persuade someone to change their religion;” however, he claims contemporary interpretations of the meaning of proselytism have “come to imply improperly forcing, bribing or taking advantage of vulnerabilities in the effort to recruit new religious adherents” (p. 9). Nonetheless, proselytism is not merely the methodology of religious conversion. Broadly understood, proselytism means persuading people to change their beliefs, viewpoints, or brand loyalties.

We live in a diverse world full of different people, ideas, ways to do things, and beliefs. Hauser (1998) argues that public opinion forms within “a public sphere, a discursive space in which individuals and groups congregate to discuss matters of mutual interest and, where possible, to reach a common judgment” (p. 86). Additionally, he postulates that within these public spheres, “society deliberates about normative standards and even develops new frameworks for expressing and evaluating social reality (p. 86). In discursive spaces, we can learn and grow collectively as societies and develop “new frameworks for expressing and evaluating” new realities. Conceptually, this conclusion is at the heart of dialogue.

The main issue to keep in view regarding proselytism is that every person has the right to change their mind and make decisions regarding their beliefs and convictions. This reality, however, does not guarantee the right of anyone to proselytize another person, i.e., to influence or compel another person to change their religious beliefs. It



seems to me that the academic literature misses the mark when it comes to scrutinizing proselytism from the perspective of individual conscience and the individual's right to choose what they wish to believe.

Allen is critically aware of proselytism. Regarding his work with TMF, he states, "I would say [that Jews] will see a group of Christians, who are not interested in conversion to Christianity, as an answer or a means for the work in which they're doing." He thinks that "[Jews] will see [a] group of people, who just love them, who aren't interested in trying to change them, that will accept them for the way they are, and that will try to find common ground [with them]."

2. Finding common ground – Allen alludes to common ground, and finding it is a crucial aspect of dialogue. Ashley explains that "the relationships that we [TMF] have are just as important as the work that we do in the cemetery." Likewise, she clarifies her views about her interactions with Jews in the context of this third space—a Jewish cemetery by describing a discussion that she had on one occasion with Szymon. She states, "[Our interaction] was because of our relationship through [the work of TMF]." She believes that "there is no other reason on earth that he would have been with us . . . had it not been for [TMF]." In reflecting, she says, "If it had just been [with] my church, or group of my friends from America coming over to work in Poland, there would be no reason for him to be there."

Ashley concludes, "So, the relationship that [TMF] has with him in his work is the reason that we have that relationship." Ashley asserts that our interaction with Szymon through working in a Jewish cemetery allows him to be "invested [in us] just

like we are invested in him.” The Jewish cemetery in Poland and the work within it is common ground.

3. Gaining understanding – Miriam is a good example of gaining understanding. Growing up in the U.S., she was the “token Jew” in her elementary school, “who was called upon to talk about Hanukkah and light the candles.” When the Christmas season arrived at her elementary school each year, she says, “We sang Christmas carols in French [class].” Later in life, she wondered, “Why did I do that? I just felt like it was forced on me . . . I had no choice in this matter in hearing the Christmas music and . . . I didn’t like it.”

She reflects upon how she has gained understanding throughout our dialogue and subsequently, she states, “So, based on our interaction . . . you have helped me understand . . . well, certainly the majority of [Christianity in] this country, or Christianity anyway [as] the basis of this country.” Likewise, she considers that she has learned that we share “more in common than differences.” In conclusion, she states, “I feel like you come from a purity of heart, and that’s what connects with me. So, the cultural differences already there, but what I’ve learned is that the values are the same, and that helps us connect.”

4. Building a sense of community – Not every Jewish cemetery restoration project that TMF facilitates in Poland is the same. Each one is unique. For Markuszów, one of the goals that Samuel and I established for the Jewish cemetery restoration project in Markuszów was to bring these two, diverse groups of people together, and from the outset to build a sense of community. Other than living, eating, and working together throughout a week, which in itself was tough at times and complicated, we added group

activities that would bring the group together. For example, we planned excursions for the group, such as being tourists, visiting the concentration and death camp of Majdanek, and daily debriefings following each workday.

The last night we were together, I conducted a focus group interview with a select group of Jewish and Christian volunteers. One question we considered was what brought the team together. Cheryl immediately states, “I am going to bring up the bus ride.” On our return trip home to Markuszów, we were all sitting in the bus, and for whatever reason, someone in the group, maybe Martha, began singing. And other people joined in and started singing with her. Most of the tunes were a couple of Broadway standards, while a few were some old gospel songs. Not everyone knew the words, but everyone participated by humming along or singing what they knew.

Cheryl continues to describe the experience. She states, “But just, we all, it was like one big happy family. [Like] when I would go to camp in the summer, and you are singing along the songs, and someone throws out one that it seems like only a few people know, and then see Martha stand up and just sing it out.” Samuel echoes Cheryl’s conclusion enthusiastically, and adds, “Yeah, that was cool.” Faith chimes in and says, “I mean, just bonding over music and laughter,” . . . Cheryl finishes her sentence, “and having a good time.”

Martha captures and summarizes the experience for this blended group of Jews and Christians. She clears her throat and speaks,

To me, [that] was just wonderful. You hear very rarely of people of different faiths and different backgrounds coming together in such a fun and happy-go-lucky way. It was so great . . . it was a perfect way to end the night after spending the day together.

Martha concludes, “It really solidified, I think, the reason why we are working together. We are working together to do something together.” She believes that we accomplished our goals for the work, but along the way, we became a “family.” For that reason, she thinks, “We were celebrating it.”

5. Speaking about matters of faith – In racial interactions, Singleton and Hays (2008) advise participants engaged in group discussions to “speak [their] truth” and point out that “a courageous conversation requires that participants be honest about their thoughts, feelings, and opinions” (p. 21). Furthermore, the notion of speaking truth intersects well with a Jewish concept termed *Dabru Emet*, which means “speak the truth to one another” (Steinfels, 2000, para. 2).

Tippett (2007) states, “Religion never ceased to matter for most people in most cultures around the world. Only northern Europe and North America became less overtly religious in the course of the twentieth century” (loc. 203). Religion matters and cannot be entirely avoided when people interact. Irrespective of faith, cultural traditions, or lack thereof, matters of belief will express themselves in dialogue across the spectrum of religious groups. Although vitally important, TMF is not seeking to advance inter-faith dialogue; nonetheless, when Christians and Jews interact with each other within the framework of a Jewish cemetery restoration project in Poland, matters of faith arise in their conversations from time to time.

For example, in Markuszów, Samuel conveys, “Most of my Christian friends [and] I, don’t talk about religion.” However, he emphasizes that in terms of what we are doing together in a Jewish cemetery, “faith and religious identity has experience, and how one lives it, its core to [everyone’s] daily life.” Faith observes, “We were all from

America, so we had that in common.” However, she states, “I think obviously the biggest difference [among us] would be Jew and Gentile. And honestly, I believe that it has been handled—just embraced, really . . . the differences.” Continuing, she adds, “Our church group has a devotion every morning, and many [of you from the Jewish group] have enjoyed that, as well, and joined . . . and when saying blessing for supper, its English and Hebrew, its Jewish and Gentile prayer.”

6. Confronting the present past – In caring for and restoring Jewish cemeteries in Poland, the work of TMF hinges upon acting in the present, while responding to the devastating impact of the past tragedies regarding the Shoah. It cannot be assumed that Jewish descendants, local Poles, volunteers, or anyone involved in the work of TMF, does not have personal thoughts and feelings about the tragic events and the aftermath of the Shoah. In one instance, I encountered a Jewish descendant’s anger.

On this one occasion, when anger erupted during a project, I did not engage it, but I let it be expressed. I wondered if I responded appropriately, and I later addressed the matter with a psychiatrist. In an email exchange with him, my Jewish friend advised me, “When the angry person is ready to engage and most likely regretting having let their emotions carry them off, then they will engage.” I thanked him for his “words of encouragement and for [his] willingness to walk with me along this path of dialogue.” In response, he writes, “You have chosen a challenging path in life by your work . . . . Your work with The Matzevah Foundation clearly inspires your following and all of my group, and clearly changes the world for the good.”

7. Overcoming differences – Szymon considers what we have accomplished over the past decade in our interaction as Jew and Christian in working together in mass

graves and in Jewish cemeteries. He states, “I feel that you are reaching, where not many want to reach. You drilled yourself through a thick wall, and you are on the other side. You are inside of that environment that is traumatic, and this is what I mean by getting deeper [in our relationship].”

Overcoming differences, navigating obstacles, and “drilling through a thick wall” of separateness, is building a bridge to span the breach of separation between Jews and Christians. Moreover, he says, “You need huge persistence and patience because people are different, and sometimes they divide. They try to evaluate, who is better, and who is worse.” He acknowledges that in my work, I have experienced such a pattern “from both sides—Baptist, [and] Jewish.” Still, in spite of these difficulties, Szymon says, “You believe in that friendship, you believe we can overcome these walls.”

### **Potential Model for Dialogue in the Third Space**

In the construct of TMF, the collective experience of dialogue reveals a possible model for dialogue. At the very least, the mutual experience of dialogue provides critical insights and a few guiding principles that illuminate a model for dialogue. Most importantly, the liminality of the Jewish cemetery and TMF’s role in caring for and restoring these sites are factors in the development of dialogue between Jews and Christians. In light of these considerations, the primary components of dialogue as encountered in the work of TMF are:

1. One-to-one interaction and the development of a relationship is the fundamental component of dialogue. As such, individuals learn to see other viewpoints and perspectives, enabling mutual growth and understanding.

2. Small group dialogue allows more intimacy to be experienced and facilitates empathy among the participants.
3. For productive dialogue to develop in a small group, the size of the small group should not exceed four or five people.
5. Honest, intellectual curiosity about the other person, or a genuine desire to learn and understand the other person, is a necessary aspect of dialogue.
6. Sincere inquiry allows those involved in genuine dialogue to consider each other's viewpoints and beliefs, allowing them to come to some understanding of each other.
7. Healthy exchange—challenges each person. Healthy dialogue is challenging, if not confrontational.
8. Dialogue is open and does not put Jewish and Christian participants into a box.
9. By discussing differences, dialogue allows Jews and Christians to “connect” and thereby bridge the gulf between them.
10. The liminal space of the Jewish cemetery provides the basis for Jews and Christians to dialogue.
11. The religious identity of Jews and Christians, who participate in dialogue, does not change during the course of dialogue.

### **Conclusions**

The consistency of the data from this case study of TMF and the interaction of Jews and Christians within its framework strongly leads to the conclusion that this study contributes to the larger body of research regarding dialogue. It specifically contributes to Jewish-Christian relations and provides valuable data concerning Jewish-Christian

dialogue. Beyond the findings presented in the discussion thus far, several conclusions are indicated.

1. Jews and Christians must address the historical rift that separates them and deal with the effects of the Shoah. Generally, relationships between Jews and Christians are not naturally occurring; therefore, they must be established and built. Thus, someone must become a peacemaker, and reach out to the other, thereby attempting to develop a relationship between them. Relationships are a crucial aspect of genuine dialogue, and the liminal space of the Jewish cemetery in Poland provides validity for Jews and Christians to interact.

Christians must be willing to acknowledge past prejudices and unjust acts. The Christian heart must be concerned or care about how the Shoah impacts Jews today. On the other hand, Jews must be willing to acknowledge Christian efforts to deal with past injustices and thereby close the rift between them. For Christians, working in Jewish cemeteries in Poland with Jews is a way to place the memory of the Shoah closer to their hearts. Likewise, for Jews, restoring a Polish-Jewish cemetery with Christians would allow them to acknowledge Christian efforts, and will enable them to interact with Christians.

2. The work of TMF creates liminal space in the Polish-Jewish cemetery that establishes a nexus between Jews and Christians. Jews and Christians are transformed through their relationships and their interaction with each other within the framework of the third space, or the liminal space of the Jewish cemetery in Poland. Remembering leads to compassionate or loving acts that seek justice for those who have no voice and cannot “seek it for themselves.” Remembering and caring for Jewish cemeteries may be



linked conceptually with restorative actions that not only change the physical state of Jewish cemeteries, but also transform communities, and the interaction of Jews and Christians. Restoring, restorative acts, or *Tikkun Olam*—the repairing of the world is a process, and not a product. The essential aspect of restoration is the linking of Jew and Christian in the physical space of a Jewish cemetery, allowing them to interact substantially with each other.

Dialogue is predicated upon interpersonal relationships between Jews and Christians within the liminal space of the Jewish cemetery in Poland. It is within the context of the Jewish cemeteries of Poland, where relationships are built, compassion is expressed, and remembering, restoring, and reconciling occurs. Jews and Christians find themselves in an emerging space, a third space in which dialogue is possible. Each person, who chooses to enter this unknown territory, must decide what they leave behind, and embrace the discovery of something uniquely new and unexpected.

3. TMF builds relational bridges that lead to bridging differences and removing barriers among Jews and Christians. Loving acts, or compassionate acts, serve as a means to bridge the chasm between Jew and Christian and allows them to stand together through caring for Jewish cemeteries in Poland. Jews and Christians may experience reconciliation by mutually cooperating in caring for and restoring Jewish cemeteries in Poland. The process of reconciliation embraces the transformation of perspectives across a broad array of viewpoints among Jews, non-Jews, and Christians. TMF functions as a third party, a catalyst, and a mediator, which enables Jews and Christians to interact, facilitating dialogue, healing, and the process of reconciliation.

## **Recommendations**

The findings of this study primarily have implications for The Matzevah Foundation, the Jewish community of Polish origins, and the Christian community. Furthermore, several areas have been identified in this study for potential further research.

### Recommendations for The Matzevah Foundation

The Members of the Board of Directors are practitioners and thereby function as “player-coaches,” who lead the work of Jewish cemetery restoration and conduct its educational activities. In light of this reality, several recommendations are being offered to the Board of Directors of TMF. In no way are these recommendations directed toward any individual, and are not intended to be criticism, but are offered as a constructive means to improve the work and practice of TMF.

1. It is recommended that the Board of Directors of TMF should consider how it might collectively continue to make inroads into the Jewish and Christian communities, and better develop and build relationships within its sphere of influence. One of the most important findings from this study is that relationships are a key component of dialogue. Numerous participants in this study referred to the work that TMF does, as building bridges. Subsequently, it is vital for the Board to keep in view building relational bridges and to maintain the importance of interpersonal relationships in its work, and in so doing, not allow the work of TMF to become institutionalized.

2. Another major finding is that loving acts or compassionate acts serve as a means to bridge the chasm between Jew and Christian and consequently allow them to begin the process of reconciling through caring for Jewish cemeteries in Poland. Jewish

cemetery restoration projects, therefore, are a means to the end and not the end of the work itself. Hence within the framework of the work of TMF, it is recommended to the Board of Directors of TMF that it strengthen its resolve and continue to pursue dialogue and reconciliation among Jews and Christians through its work.

3. Regarding dialogue, another clear finding is how a sense of community contributed to gaining and developing understanding among participants. It is recommended to the Board of TMF that it should work toward building a sense of community among participants in each Jewish cemetery project that it conducts. Other than living, eating, and working together throughout a week, the data reveals the importance of engaging Jewish and Christian volunteers in group orientated activities, such as cultural excursions, touring historical sites, meeting with local government officials and community representatives, and conducting daily debriefings following each workday.

4. The findings also indicate that, concerning the work of TMF in Jewish cemeteries in Poland, Jews and Christians find themselves in an emerging space, a third space, in which dialogue is possible. Each person, who chooses to enter this unknown territory of dialogue, must decide what they leave behind, and embrace the discovery of something uniquely new. Moreover, as Ashley specifies, entering this space “will change you if you let it . . . and not just be a bystander.” It is therefore recommended that Members of the Board of Directors of TMF consider what is negotiable, and what they may leave behind in their cultural framework, as Christians. This step will lead to their discovery and understanding of “the other” by becoming more cross-culturally sensitive in their work with Jews and other groups of people.

5. In restoring Jewish cemeteries, it should be expected for Jewish descendants of Shoah survivors or victims to express trauma, i.e., emotions regarding the loss of family members and its impact on their families. For this reason, it is recommended that the Board of Directors of TMF should seek a means for itself to be trained in navigating emotions, counseling, and development in their understanding of human relations, and conflict mediation.

6. Correspondingly, Board Members of TMF should develop a broader understanding of Polish-Jewish history prior to, during, and following the Shoah. They should also develop an understanding of the spectrum of Jewish viewpoints regarding the culpability of the institutional church, and how its role in the Shoah reflects upon them, as Christians, in their interaction with the Jewish community. To this end, it is recommended that board members enroll in a course for credit or certification regarding the Shoah.

7. The findings reveal that religion has its place in the work of restoring Jewish cemeteries in Poland. The findings support the fact that in their dialogue, Jews and Christians speak about faith as it arises. Consequently, it is recommended that the Board might consider how it may continue to speak truthfully about matters of faith, while engaging Jews, Christians, and non-religious people in dialogue within the framework of their work.

8. Another major finding of this study is that working with Jews, in caring for and restoring Jewish cemeteries in Poland is a way to place the memory of the Shoah closer to the hearts of Christians. Thus, it is recommended to the Board of TMF that they consider in what ways they may practically advocate their work and actively engage

individual Christians and churches in caring for and restoring Jewish cemeteries in Poland.

9. In light of these recommendations, it is additionally recommended that the Board of TMF consider how it may refine its Shoah educational efforts and produce seminars through which it may introduce its work to churches and synagogues, and subsequently involve them in its work.

10. One final significant finding is the role that TMF plays in cultural stewardship. It is highly recommended to the Board of TMF that it continue to develop and explore the cultural stewardship model of linking Jewish descendants with local Polish communities in the long-term care of Jewish cemeteries. By so doing, TMF may facilitate not only the long-term care of cemeteries, but it may also develop communities of memory that facilitate the restoration of relationships, healing, and reconciliation.

#### Recommendations for the Jewish Community of Polish Origins

The research produced some useful findings that have implications for the Jewish community of Polish origins in their interaction with Christian Poles and other Christians. These recommendations are offered objectively and constructively in complete sincerity and humility.

1. It is recommended that Jews of Polish descent consider engaging local Polish communities in the long-term care of their ancestral cemeteries. The Jewish cemetery is a remnant of the once significant and vibrant presence of Jews in Poland. The findings substantiate the fact that it represents a potential liminal space in which Jews and Christian Poles might meet and confront a painful and traumatic past, with “something small,” such as, partnering with the local school in cleaning the Jewish cemetery. The

findings also demonstrate that social action such as restoring the physical space of the Jewish cemeteries, allows the possibility of restoring societal interactions and the restoration of the space between people; it also allows individuals to begin healing.

2. Another finding is that the Jewish cemetery is a unique liminal space in which Jew and Christian may begin to interact, learn to dialogue, and work toward reconciliation. If synagogues wish to open dialogue and develop a relationship with Christian congregations in their local communities, it is recommended that they consider joining forces with local churches in the long-term care of Jewish cemeteries in Poland. Additionally, the findings reveal that reconciliation embraces the transformation of perspectives across a broad array of viewpoints among Jews and Christians working with each other in the Jewish cemetery in Poland. According to Miriam, such an endeavor offers both Jews and Christians “an opportunity for people to grow and change, and rethink their, their preconceptions” about each other.

3. The findings reveal that *Tikkun Olam* is a promising pathway for Jews and Christians to explore in addressing the social needs of their collective communities. In pursuing justice, Rabbi Zimmer affirms that Jews and Christians “can come together for an action that expresses both of our faiths.” It is recommended that Jewish leadership work with like-minded Christian leadership in addressing the social needs of their community.

4. The concept of building relational bridges is a promising finding that offers Jews and Christians an opportunity to overcome differences and develop a strong and durable understanding of each other. Bridge-building develops common ground for dialogue and produces the underpinnings for further cooperation. Building a relationship

is mutually achieved and is greater than the individuals who created it. It is recommended that members of the Jewish community recognize similarities with the Christian community and not differences, thereby seeking to build bridges and develop common ground for dialogue.

### Recommendations for the Christian Community

The findings bear significant implications for the Christian community, primarily for Christian educators, theologians, denominational policymakers, local pastors, church leadership, and individual Christians. These recommendations are objective and are offered as a means to close the rift between Christians and *the root of Christianity*.

1. The literature demonstrates that many Christians have not collectively come to terms with the Shoah and the role that the institutional church played in its horrific events. One of the significant findings of this study is that it is possible for Christians to care about the impact of the Shoah on Jews and to take effective action to bridge the chasm and close the gap between Christians and Jews. It is recommended that Christian churches, educators, and leaders should consider in what practical manner within their given set of circumstances they may acknowledge the Shoah, and address the rift that exists between them and their Jewish neighbors, peers, and community leaders.

2. Additionally, the literature establishes that Christian compassion should not exclude anyone. It must embrace the whole of humanity and be positively inclined toward acting justly when injustice arises; otherwise, moral catastrophes, such as the Shoah, may arise. The findings of this study indicate that the Shoah may be placed “closer to the heart” of Christians by working with Jews to care for Jewish cemeteries in Poland. It is recommended that Christian leaders explore other areas of public ministry

that may bridge the chasm between them and the Jewish community, allowing them to work toward reconciliation.

3. A major finding is that proselytism is a major factor in Jewish-Christian relations and lurks in the background, potentially obstructing Jewish-Christian dialogue. It is recommended that Christians should re-examine their understanding of the proclamation of the gospel and address their attempts to proselytize Jews.

4. Another recommendation is for Christians to seek to develop liminal spaces between themselves and Jews by exploring other possibilities of joining the Jewish community in works of *Tikkun Olam* as a means of establishing and building bridges for dialogue and reconciliation.

5. The concept of building relational bridges is a promising conclusion that offers Jews and Christians an opportunity to overcome differences and develop an understanding of each other. Bridge-building develops common ground for dialogue and produces the underpinnings for further cooperation. Building a relationship is mutually achieved and is greater than the individuals who built it. It is recommended that members of the Christian community recognize similarities with the Jewish community and overlooking the differences, thereby seeking to build bridges and develop common ground for dialogue.

6. The literature indicates that dialogue is an interchange framed by humility, and not by arrogance, or pride. In dialogue, parties should not seek to “prevail over [their] opponent at whatever cost” (Donskis, 2013, para. 5). One of the noteworthy findings is that it is possible for Jews and Christians to experience genuine dialogue. For this reason,



it is recommended that individual Christians develop relationships with their Jewish peers for dialogue and not proselytism.

### Recommendations for Further Research

The case study of The Matzevah Foundation demonstrates that it is possible for dialogue to emerge in the third space of the work of TMF in caring for and restoring Jewish cemeteries in Poland. It provides insights regarding how Jews and Christians develop relationships, mutually care, remember, restore, reconcile, and learn to dialogue within a specific space or set of circumstances. This study is a step forward toward understanding Jewish and Christian dialogue, but the findings imply that additional research is needed.

1. The concept of liminality proved to be pivotal regarding the facilitation of dialogue in Jewish-Christian interaction. It is recommended that further research be conducted regarding what other liminal spaces exist among and between Jews and Christians that might construct a conducive environment for dialogue.

2. It is recommended that researchers consider what other restorative acts might be considered a method or avenue to place matters of the Shoah closer to the hearts of Christians.

3. Theories and mechanisms of forgiveness were indicated as potentially emerging in this study, but the concepts of forgiveness were not found directly in the findings of this study. Exploring how forgiveness might be experienced between Jews and Christians is a recommended research topic.

4. Another suggested research topic is: in what ways might the concept of *Tikkun Olam* be linked to the Christian understanding of redemption, allowing Jews and

Christians to explore mutual cooperation in addressing the social and spiritual needs of their communities.

5. The model of dialogue that emerged for Jewish-Christian dialogue is grounded within the specific construct of TMF. The TMF model of dialogue holds the promise of healing in other occurrences of racial division and conflict. It is recommended that researchers consider whether or not this model has validity in different situations, such as conflicted relationships between ethnic, religious, or social groups.

### **Final Thoughts**

I find myself in the middle space; however, I am not between the electrified fences of Majdanek. I am between the Jew and the Gentile-Christian. I have come to understand that neither group understands me. I think that the photograph that I made in December 1988 of the Nazi Concentration and Death Camp of Majdanek is significant, as can be seen in Photograph 12. It captures and symbolizes my involvement as a Christian dealing with reconciliation in the context of the Shoah. Several years ago, I reflected upon how I view my relationship with Jews and Christians in this liminal space:

I live between two cultures, a third culture, but I am neither. I see myself as a hybrid. I have elements of both within me. Sometimes, I am misunderstood, so I work to understand and reconcile the two.

I am learning about myself and who I am. I am also learning about dialogue and the work of reconciliation through remembering the Shoah and its victims by caring and leading others to restore Jewish cemeteries in Poland.



*Photograph 12. Between the Fences*

“No Man’s Land” lies between the fences at the Nazi Concentration and Death Camp of Majdanek in Lublin, Poland. Photograph by Steven D. Reece. © Copyright 1988-2019.

APPENDIX A

LETTER OF AUTHORIZATION FROM TMF



# MATZEVAH מצבה

REMEMBERING - RESTORING - RECONCILING

May 28, 2015

Institutional Review Board  
Andrews University  
4150 Administrative Drive, Room 322  
Berrien Springs, MI 49104-0355

To Whom It May Concern:

The Board of Directors of The Matzevah Foundation met for our semi-annual meeting from March 6, 2015 through March 8, 2015. One of the agenda items addressed was a request by Steven D. Reece, President of the Board, regarding his dissertation titled, *The Third Space: The Meeting of Jew and Christian in the Act of Remembering, Restoring and Reconciling – A Case Study of The Matzevah Foundation*.

Steven presented his dissertation prospectus and requested permission to conduct research and to do a case study of The Matzevah Foundation. The board voted in the affirmative. Steven has been granted permission to proceed with his research of The Matzevah Foundation and its work. He may interview board members, advisory board members and volunteers providing that they are willing and that he secures informed consent from each participant in his study.

Respectfully,

JoAnn Siegienski  
Board Secretary

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THE MATZEVAH FOUNDATION, INC. 7742 SPALDING DRIVE, NO. 480 NORCROSS, GA 30092-4207

APPENDIX B

LETTER OF AUTHORIZATION FROM IRB

September 30, 2015

Steven Reece  
Tel: (404) 663-2383  
Email: [sdreece@matzevah.org](mailto:sdreece@matzevah.org)

**RE: APPLICATION FOR APPROVAL OF RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS**

**IRB Protocol #:** 15-121 **Application Type:** Original **Dept.:** Leadership  
**Review Category:** Full **Action Taken:** Approved **Advisor:** Erich Baumgartner  
**Title:** The third space: The meeting of Jew and Christian in the act of remembering,  
restoring and reconciling – A case study of the Matzevah Foundation.

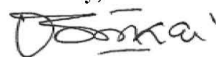
This letter is to advise you that the Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed and approved your IRB application for research involving human subjects entitled: *“The third space: The meeting of Jew and Christian in the act of remembering, restoring and reconciling – A case study of the Matzevah Foundation”* IRB protocol number 15-121 under Full category. This approval is valid until September 30, 2016. If your research is not completed by the end of this period you must apply for an extension at least four weeks prior to the expiration date. We ask that you inform IRB Office whenever you complete your research. Please reference the protocol number in future correspondence regarding this study.

Any future changes (see IRB Handbook pages 10-11) made to the study design and/or consent form require prior approval from the IRB before such changes can be implemented. To request for extension, modification and completion of your study please use the attached form.

While there appears to be no more than minimum risk with your study, should an incidence occur that results in a research-related adverse reaction and/or physical injury, (see IRB Handbook page 11) this must be reported immediately in writing to the IRB. Any project-related physical injury must also be reported immediately to the University physician, Dr. Reichert, by calling (269) 473-2222.

We wish you success in your research project. Please feel free to contact our office if you have questions.

Sincerely,



Mordekai Ongo  
Research Integrity & Compliance Officer

Institutional Review Board - 4150 Administration Dr Room 322 - Berrien Springs, MI 49104-0355  
Tel: (269) 471-6361 Fax: (269) 471-6543 E-mail: [irb@andrews.edu](mailto:irb@andrews.edu)

## APPENDIX C

### INDIVIDUAL RESEARCH PARTICIPATION CONSENT FORM

#### Consent Form for Participation in Research Study

Andrews University  
Department of Leadership  
PhD Leadership Program  
Berrien Springs, Michigan

#### **Research activity**

You are being asked to take part in a case study of The Matzevah Foundation regarding its work of caring for and restoring Jewish cemeteries in Poland. Participants in this research study will be interviewed in private locations located in the United States or Poland. In rare circumstances, some interviews may be conducted via Skype.

#### **What the study is about**

The purpose of this study is to explore elements of Jewish-Christian dialogue as demonstrated and encountered through the work of The Matzevah Foundation in caring for and restoring Jewish cemeteries in Poland. The principal aims of this study are two-fold: to understand firstly how have Jews and Christians responded to the work of The Matzevah Foundation and secondly to describe in what ways Jewish-Christian dialogue (or lack thereof) have been influenced by mutual cooperation in caring for Jewish cemeteries in Poland.



### **What you are being asked to do**

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be interviewed. In the interview, you will be asked a series of open-ended questions about what you have encountered or experienced in your work or association with The Matzevah Foundation. You are free to answer these questions as you wish. The interview will last no longer than one hour. With your permission, an audio recording of the interview will be made using a digital audio recorder.

### **Potential risks and discomforts**

For the most part, there will be no physical risks associated with this study. Every effort has been made to conduct the interview in a comfortable setting and at a location or time that is convenient for you. During the course of the interview you may experience some emotional or psychological discomfort as you recall details from past encounters or experiences with anti-Semitism, racism, hatred, or other issues that may emerge from your interaction with the legacy of the Shoah (Holocaust), Jewish-Christian interaction, and/or the work of The Matzevah Foundation. If during the interview, you become visibly distressed, upset, or unable to continue the interview, the interview will be terminated. If at any time during the course of the interview you feel unreasonably stressed, uneasy, or unable to continue, you may choose to end the interview. According to the legal policy of Andrews University, I must inform you:

In the unlikely event of injury resulting from this research, Andrews University is not able to offer financial compensation nor to absorb the costs of medical treatment. However, assistance will be provided to research subjects in obtaining emergency treatment and professional services that are available to the community generally at

nearby facilities. My signature below acknowledges my consent to voluntarily participate in this research project. Such participation does not release the investigator(s), sponsor(s) or granting agency (ies) from their professional and ethical responsibility to me.

If you feel that you have experienced any psychological discomfort, you may contact Dr. Pseudonym via phone or email for further assistance. Dr. Pseudonym is a board certified psychiatrist and may be reached by telephone at (555) 555-5555 or via email at office@pseudonym.com.

### **Potential benefits to participants and/or society**

By participating in this study, you will not benefit directly; however, your participation may enrich you indirectly as you consider and respond reflectively to questions posed by this study. Collectively speaking, this study may potentially benefit both the Jewish and the Christian communities by discovering and elucidating elements and/or concepts concerning the potential transformation of assumptions and perceptions encountered within the Jewish and Christian communities directed toward “the other” and may lead to new pathways, expand avenues, or open new approaches to Jewish-Christian dialogue. Consequently, this study may lead to new possibilities in Jewish-Christian interaction, which may potentially allow forgiveness and possibly reconciliation to emerge beyond the level of contemporary, institutional, or interfaith dialogue.

### **Compensation**

You will not be compensated in any way for your participation in this study. You are agreeing to participate in this study out of your own goodwill.

### **Your answers will be confidential**

All data, notes, and records resulting from this interview, conducted as a part of this study must be kept private and confidential for a period of three years. Your answers will be kept confidential at all times. Otherwise, when transcribing the interview, pseudonyms will be used as a means to identify you. Your responses or data will not be linked to you personally in any way. Research notes and field records will be securely stored in a locked file cabinet. Electronic data in the form of audio recordings and transcriptions will be stored on a password protected hard drive and will be backed up and stored using the password protected, cloud service known as DropBox. These materials will be stored for three years.

### **Taking part in this study is voluntary**

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and your refusal to to participate in this study will involve no penalty. You may discontinue your participation in this study at any time without penalty and there will no change in the relationship with any of the organizations involved.

### **If you have questions**

The person conducting this study is Steven D. Reece, who is a candidate for the PhD in Leadership at Andrews University in Berrien Springs, Michigan. If you have any questions, please ask them at this time. Steven will be glad to answer your questions. If you have questions at a later time, you contact Steven D. Reece by email at [sdreece@matzevah.org](mailto:sdreece@matzevah.org) or by phone 404-663-2383. You may also send him a letter to his mailing address:

Steven D. Reece  
6884 Tilton Lane  
Atlanta, GA 30360

If you wish to talk to one of Steven D. Reece's advisors you may either contact Dr. Erich Baumgartner, who is the Coordinator for the PhD Leadership Program of the Department of Leadership at Andrews University by email at [baumgart@andrews.edu](mailto:baumgart@andrews.edu) or by phone at 269-471-2523 or you may contact Dr. Shirley A. Freed, who is Professor Emerita of Leadership and Qualitative Research at Andrews University by email at [freed@andrews.edu](mailto:freed@andrews.edu) or by phone at 269-471-4939.

The Institutional Review Board of Andrews University has reviewed my request to conduct this study. If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a participant in this study, you may contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Andrews University at 269-471-6361 or by email at [irb@andrews.edu](mailto:irb@andrews.edu). For further information and to learn more about the research process at Andrews, you may access the university's IRB's website at [http://www.andrews.edu/services/research/research\\_compliance/institutional\\_review/](http://www.andrews.edu/services/research/research_compliance/institutional_review/).

***Please note that you will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.***

**Statement of consent**

I have read the above information provided to me in this form. I have been able to ask questions and receive answers to any questions that I may have had. Therefore, I consent to take part in the study by interviewed today.

Your Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Your Name (printed) \_\_\_\_\_

In addition to agreeing to participate, I also consent to having the interview recorded electronically using a digital audio recorder.

Your Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of person obtaining consent \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Printed name of person obtaining consent \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

This consent form will be kept by the researcher for at least three years beyond the end of the study.

## APPENDIX D

### FOCUS GROUP RESEARCH PARTICIPATION CONSENT FORM

#### Consent Form for Focus Group Participation in Research Study

Andrews University  
Department of Leadership  
PhD Leadership Program  
Berrien Springs, Michigan

#### **Research activity**

You are being asked to take part in a case study of The Matzevah Foundation regarding its work of caring for and restoring Jewish cemeteries in Poland. Participants in this research study focus group will be interviewed in a private location in Poland or the United States.

#### **What the study is about**

The purpose of this study is to explore elements of Jewish-Christian dialogue as demonstrated and encountered through the work of The Matzevah Foundation in caring for and restoring Jewish cemeteries in Poland. The principal aims of this study are two-fold: to understand firstly how have Jews and Christians responded to the work of The Matzevah Foundation and secondly to describe in what ways Jewish-Christian dialogue (or lack thereof) have been influenced by mutual cooperation in caring for Jewish cemeteries in Poland.

### **What you are being asked to do**

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be interviewed in the context of a small group of people or what is known as a focus group. In the focus group interview, the group will be asked a series of open-ended questions about what they (you) have encountered or experienced in their (your) work or association with The Matzevah Foundation. You are free to answer these questions as you wish. The interview will last no longer than one and a half hours. With your permission and the permission of the focus group, the interview will be recorded electronically using a digital audio recorder.

### **Potential risks and discomforts**

For the most part, there will be no physical risks associated with this study. Every effort has been made to conduct the interview for the focus group in a comfortable setting and at a time that is convenient for you. During the course of the interview you may experience some emotional or psychological discomfort as you recall details from past encounters or experiences with anti-Semitism, racism, hatred, or other issues that may emerge from your interaction with the legacy of the Shoah (Holocaust), Jewish-Christian interaction, and/or the work of The Matzevah Foundation. If during the focus group interview, you or anyone becomes visibly distressed, upset, or unable to continue the interview, the interview will be terminated. If at any time during the course of the interview you or anyone else in the focus group feels unreasonably stressed, uneasy, or unable to continue, you or the focus group may choose to end the interview. According to the legal policy of Andrews University, the following must be provided:

In the unlikely event of injury resulting from this research, Andrews University is not able to offer financial compensation nor to absorb the costs of medical treatment.

However, assistance will be provided to research subjects in obtaining emergency treatment and professional services that are available to the community generally at nearby facilities. My signature below acknowledges my consent to voluntarily participate in this research project. Such participation does not release the investigator(s), sponsor(s) or granting agency(ies) from their professional and ethical responsibility to me.

If you feel that you have experienced any psychological discomfort, you may contact Dr. Pseudonym via phone or email for further assistance. Dr. Pseudonym is a board certified psychiatrist and may be reached by telephone at (555) 555-5555 or via email at office@pseudonym.com.

**Potential benefits to participants and/or society**

By participating in this study, you or this focus group will not benefit directly; however, your participation and the participation of the focus group at large may enrich you and other focus group members indirectly as you consider and respond reflectively to questions posed by this study. Collectively speaking, this study may potentially benefit both the Jewish and the Christian communities by discovering and elucidating elements and/or concepts concerning the potential transformation of assumptions and perceptions encountered within the Jewish and Christian communities directed toward “the other” and may lead to new pathways, expand avenues, or open new approaches to Jewish-Christian dialogue. Consequently, this study may lead to new possibilities in Jewish-Christian interaction, which may potentially allow forgiveness and possibly reconciliation to emerge beyond the level of contemporary, institutional, or interfaith dialogue.



## **Compensation**

You will not be compensated in any way for your participation in the focus group for this study. You are agreeing to participate in this study out of your own goodwill.

*Your answers will be confidential*

Since you are being interviewed in the context of a focus group, other people are present, who will hear your responses. For this reason, no guarantee of confidentiality may be expected. Consequently the members of this focus group will know how you responded to the interview questions and will form their own conclusions apart from this study. They may be able to identify you in future reports according to your responses and for this reason no guarantee complete confidentiality may be expected. Nevertheless, the nature of this study involves group discovery, which means that the emphasis will be placed upon what the group says instead of individual responses. This does not mean however that some individual responses will not be cited, but may be used as illustrative examples to explain or support conclusions. All data, notes, and records resulting from this focus group interview conducted as a part of this study must be kept private and confidential for a period of three years. Your answers along with the answers of the group will be kept confidential at all times. Otherwise, when transcribing the interview, pseudonyms will be used as a means to identify you and the members of this focus group. Your responses or data will not be linked to you or the group personally. Research notes and field records will be securely stored in a locked file cabinet. Electronic data in the form of audio recordings and transcriptions will be stored on a password protected hard drive and will be backed up and stored using the password protected, cloud service known as DropBox. These materials will be stored for three years.

### **Taking part in this study is voluntary**

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and your refusal to to participate in this study will involve no penalty. You may discontinue your participation in this study at any time without penalty and there will no change in the relationship with any of the organizations involved.

### **If you have questions**

The person conducting this study is Steven D. Reece, who is a candidate for the PhD in Leadership at Andrews University in Berrien Springs, Michigan. If you have any questions, please ask them at this time. Steven will be glad to answer your questions. If you have questions at a later time, you contact Steven D. Reece by email at [sdreece@matzevah.org](mailto:sdreece@matzevah.org) or by phone 404-663-2383. You may also send him a letter to his mailing address:

Steven D. Reece  
6884 Tilton Lane  
Atlanta, GA 30360

If you wish to talk to one of Steven D. Reece's advisors you may either contact Dr. Erich Baumgartner, who is the Coordinator for the PhD Leadership Program of the Department of Leadership at Andrews University by email at [baumgart@andrews.edu](mailto:baumgart@andrews.edu) or by phone at 269-471-2523 or you may contact Dr. Shirley A. Freed, who is Professor Emerita of Leadership and Qualitative Research at Andrews University by email at [freed@andrews.edu](mailto:freed@andrews.edu) or by phone at 269-471-4939. The Institutional Review Board of Andrews University has reviewed my request to conduct this study. If you have any

questions or concerns regarding your rights as a participant in this study, you may contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Andrews University at 269-471-6361 or by email at [irb@andrews.edu](mailto:irb@andrews.edu). For further information and to learn more about the research process at Andrews, you may access the university's IRB's website at [http://www.andrews.edu/services/research/research\\_compliance/institutional\\_review/](http://www.andrews.edu/services/research/research_compliance/institutional_review/).

***Please note that you will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.***

Statement of consent

I have read the above information provided to me in this form. I have been able to ask questions and receive answers to any questions that I may have had. Therefore, I consent to take part in the study by interviewed today.

Your Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Your Name (printed) \_\_\_\_\_

In addition to agreeing to participate, I also consent to having the interview recorded electronically using a digital audio recorder.

Your Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of person obtaining consent \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Printed name of person obtaining consent \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

This consent form will be kept by the researcher for at least three years beyond the end of the study.

## APPENDIX E

### INDIVIDUAL AND FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interview Protocol: Jewish-Christian Dialogue in the Context of TMF

Date:

Interview Time:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Position of the Interviewee:

Project Description:

Questions:

1. How do you characterize the work of The Matzevah Foundation (TMF)?

What is your role or how are you or how have you been involved?

2. What motivates you to be involved in the work of TMF? In what way is the work of TMF important to you?

3. What have you experienced or learned in your association with the work of TMF Describe a meaningful experience from you association with TMF? What did these experiences teach you? What has changed in you or how have your views changed?

4. In your association with TMF, describe an encounter with someone who is different from you. How did you feel about the other person or persons?

5. In your interaction, what do you think brought you and the other person together? What separated or drove you apart?

6. How have you handled cultural differences or differences in values or beliefs that you have encountered in the work of TMF?

7. What do you think the future holds for the people who interact in the work of TMF?

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## CURRICULUM VITAE

Steven D. Reece

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Steven D. Reece is founder and President of The Matzevah Foundation, a nonprofit organization incorporated in Georgia in 2010. He leads members and volunteers of the Foundation to educate the public about the Holocaust and restore Jewish cemeteries in Poland. Its purpose is to remember and honor Jewish heritage of Poland, restore what was lost, and reconcile Jews and Gentiles through a common mitzvah or good deed.

Mr. Reece is an advisor for the European Jewish Cemeteries Advisory Network (EJCAN). EJCAN is a network “of more than 30 international experts representing a range of professional skills and expertise related to Jewish cemeteries who can be contacted for advice on a number of issues.” He is also certified to teach about the Holocaust through Yad Vashem and Tel Aviv University.

For ten years, Mr. Reece worked as a photojournalist before entering religious and charitable work. He is an ordained Baptist minister and is a graduate of Baylor University and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Presently, he is a candidate for the Doctor of Philosophy in Leadership at Andrews University and will graduate in May 2020.