Finding Common Ground™
Why I, as a Black Man, Attend KKK Rallies
Daryl Davis

Philip: Hello, everyone, and welcome back to Finding Common Ground. I'm Philip Hellmich and I serve as the Director of Peace at The Shift Network, and oh my gosh, are we having an incredible experience. I'm here with my co-host, Sister Jenna. Sister Jenna, has this been amazing?

Sister Jenna: I'm speechless and that's not usually easy. I'm also finding tools in which I'm letting go of old things for me that I just don't need anymore.

Philip: Yeah, it's just been incredible. To remind people, Sister Jenna is the founder of the Brahma Kumaris Meditation Museums and America Meditating Radio. She's the host of that. Sister Jenna, these last few sessions -- the first day just took us so deep with Shariff, James, Sami Awad, Khalida, and just how people have been able to go through anger, get to a place of love, move beyond identities, and then these sessions here with Arno and Pardeep about going from White extremists and then having a father killed by White extremists, their journey together. We're just really discovering some common elements of the human capacity for forgiveness, compassion, and love.

Sister Jenna: These are the times that I praise technology because I would not perhaps be able to go to Pakistan and sit and learn about mercy killings as Khalida Brohi shared with us. Perhaps I would not be able to go into countries like Africa and find out the deepest wounds that are going on and that there are people there who are not focusing on the wounds, but they're focusing on the solution. I came up with a nice title, everyone, for those that have been on the Summer of Peace Summit. I'm calling every one of our guests "solutionaries" and I think those of us who signed up in the Finding Common Ground Summit for the Summer of Peace, we are now officially solutionaries because I don't think the soul's energy and value and worth is to be stuck in the problem or what's not working or to be stuck in the anxiety or the fear.

Philip: Right, exactly. The part that gives me great hope is this whole intersection. Our friends at the Alliance for Peacebuilding talk about this a lot. It's the intersection of spirituality, whatever background and tradition, neuroscience. We're wired for compassion. We're also wired for fight, flight, and freeze, and then also the practical tools of peacebuilding of how we engage to find common ground, so all of that is quite -- and sister, we have an incredible session coming up here. We have our guest waiting for an introduction.
Sister Jenna: Yes, and I can't wait to bring him on, everyone. Of course, as you know, the Finding Common Ground with the Summer of Peace Summit has been partnering with an amazing organization called Live A Moment that was founded by Deborah Greene. We're really asking you to download that app because it's a major movement, but also while you're doing it and while you're listening to these conversations, please let us know how they're impacting your heart. Go to our Facebook page, The Shift Network, and don't forget the hashtag #SummerOfPeace. Now, I'm an old school person and I'm learning all of these things. My understanding now is that when you at least hashtag #SummerOfPeace, sometimes when we have some free time, we just go into that library of experience and consciousness and just pull from it, so it's really, really imperative that you definitely share this with your friends and with your family and colleagues because I personally feel -- I'm telling you, this has changed me. My new title, I'm a solutionary. I'm not a Brahma Kumari anymore. I'm a solutionary and I just feel like there are old things or things that we now just need to let go of because they're not working. I think our next guest coming up is definitely going to show us some techniques that he used back in the day that are still very valid today, but how much he's also refined history. Do you want me to introduce amazing Daryl Davis?

Philip: Yes. Well, first of all, just the name of the session, Klan We Talk.

Sister Jenna: That's amazing.

Philip: I love it, Klan We Talk.

Sister Jenna: Klan We Talk. Can you imagine? Here I've got to go into this because Daryl Davis has been summoned that we've been just honored to have on this summit. He's not White. He's not Chinese. I think he's got some Indian in him, but he's got this presence about him, so make no mistake about it, Daryl Davis is an African-American, yet Klan-Destine Relationships author. Daryl Davis has come in close contact with members of the KKK than most Whites and certainly definitely most Blacks and actually walked out alive. Now, short of being on the wrong end of the rope, what's more is that he continues to do so, making them his friends through his music, through his genuine way of showing up, and just through his form of dialogue. I think over the past three decades, he has walked on the edge of being in a culture, in a tribe of consciousness in which many of us might be very, very concerned about walking into these doors. Now, one of the most intriguing things that I learned about Daryl Davis when he was on my radio show, America Meditating, was that he plays a wicked piano. Sometimes that piano is on fire and I mean literally on fire. Now, wouldn't that grab your attention? Come on. So with great honor, the Finding Common Ground Summer of Peace Summit proudly welcomes this amazing, amazing child of God, Daryl Davis. Daryl, thank you so, so much for joining us on this summit. You have no idea how my

Daryl Davis | August 8, 2018 | p. 2
heart is already touched and how wide I am in terms of preparing for all the jewels that you're about to share with us and everyone on this summit. Thank you.

Daryl: Thank you so much to you and Philip for having me here. I sincerely appreciate it and I've been looking forward to this.

Sister Jenna: Good. Philip, why don't you start off with the first question since you're a little bit lighter than I am?

Philip: Just right out of the box, what in the world inspired you being a Black musician to reach out to people in the KKK?

Daryl: Well, you have to understand my background, first of all. Let me just tell it to you. I was a child of parents in the US Foreign Service, so I grew up as an American Embassy brat way back in the early 1960s. We were going overseas to various countries. We're there for two years. We come here back here to the States for a little while, then another country for two years. Combining my travels as a child with my parents with my travels now as an adult professional musician touring all over the world, I've been in a total of 56 different countries on six continents. I've literally been exposed to a multitude of religions, ethnicities, cultures, et cetera, and all of that has helped shape who I've become. Having been inundated with that as a child, it was very hard for me to understand when I would come back home here to my own country and see discrimination based upon color of my skin or religion against somebody else, et cetera. I formed a question in my mind at the age of ten, which is, how can you hate me when you don't even know me? For the next 50 years, I've been looking for the answer to that question.

Sister Jenna: What are some of the answers that you have found so far?

Daryl: Well, initially when I would ask White supremacists, I would be told that I'm inferior. The brains of Black people are smaller than the brains of White people. Black people are prone to laziness. We're prone to crime. We sell drugs. We rape people. Every stereotype you can imagine, I have heard. Now, over time through dialogue and conversation, and as you say, Finding Common Ground, being that solutionary, when the question is later asked, the answer is, "Daryl, I really can't hate you. I have no reason to hate you. You're no different than I am. You want the same things for your family as I want for mine."

Philip: That's beautiful. Before you got to there, were you ever triggered or did you ever have your hot buttons pressed? If you did, how did you manage that and how did you engage? How did you engage in a way where you could be met?
Daryl: Okay. Well, the thing you have to do, you have to arm yourself and you arm yourself with information and knowledge. I would go into these meetings knowing at least as much as a Klan leader, if not more than he knew about his organization. I have a vast library on Black supremacy, White supremacy, anti-Semitism, the Ku Klux Klan, the Nazis in Germany, the Neo-Nazis over here, so I have that knowledge. So whether they like me or not, they respect me because of that knowledge and they see, "This guy has done his homework" and then they become curious about you and want to engage in conversation with you. Sure, I hear a lot of offensive things, but because I have that knowledge, I know what to expect. I know they're going to say these things, so I'm not going to allow them to push my buttons.

When they're talking to me and telling me that my brain is smaller than theirs, that I have a proclivity towards being on welfare or raping somebody or being a criminal, et cetera, they're not defining me. They can't define me. I know who I am and this is my first meeting with them, so how can you hate me when you don't even know me? Inside I'm laughing because this is ridiculous, but I want them to express themselves so that I have a better understanding of what they're feeling because regardless of whether they're wrong or they're right, one's perspective is one's reality. For them, I represent that reality until they get to know me and I allow them the opportunity to express themselves unlike con at them with guns blazing, which is what they're accustomed to, and nothing ever gets solved.

Sister Jenna: I am itching to ask you this question. After you've studied all of the books on anti-Semitism, Black supremacy, White supremacy and so on, was there some common thread that you were able to pull out of all that?

Daryl: Yes, lack of exposure. One of my very favorite quotes of all time is by Mark Twain, the great author. It's called The Travel Quote and Mark Twain said, "Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry and narrow-mindedness, and many of our people need it sorely on these accounts. Broad, wholesome, charitable views of men and things cannot be acquired by vegetating in one little corner of the earth all one's lifetime." That is so true because if I think about it, had I not had that travel experience, had I grown up here in my own country my 60 years that I've been on this earth, would I have done these things? Maybe not. I would like to think so, but maybe not. Having seen many different cultures and seen how people can get along, I knew we could do it. Another quote is if you can't take Muhammad to the mountain, you bring the mountain to Muhammad. So granted these people may not have the 56 countries that I've been to under their belt and maybe they will never travel, but perhaps I can bring some of that experience to them vicariously and share it with them like the mountain and Muhammad.
Sister Jenna: That's beautiful.

Philip: Yeah. I'm curious how these dialogues would start and how they would evolve and how would you manage those. I heard you would ask what they thought of you. You would hear that part. After that, how would they evolve?

Daryl: Well, a clansman or a clanswoman is not stamped out of a standard cookie cutter. They come from all different walks of life and believe it or not, all educational backgrounds, not just 3rd Grade dropouts that you see on daytime TV yelling and screaming and throwing chairs at the host and all that kind of thing. We have 3rd Grade dropouts, of course, but we've had clan members all the way to the White House. President Warren G. Harding was sworn into the Ku Klux Klan in the Green Room of the White House. President Harry Truman before he became president, he had joined the Klan for a very short time. He didn't like it and he got out. Supreme Court Justice Hugo Black had to leave the Klan in order to be on the Supreme Court.

More recently, the late senator from West Virginia, Robert Byrd, was a clansman back in the 1940s. They come from all different educational backgrounds and depending upon why they joined the Klan would tend to steer the conversation. For example, some may join because, "My grandfather was in the clan," "My daddy was in the clan, so I'm in the clan and my kids are going to be in the clan," a family tradition. Others join for socio-economic reasons. For example, you take a depressed town, let's say a coal mining town in West Virginia or Pennsylvania. People who have been digging coal for 30 years all their lives, that's all they know, their whole family has been in the business. Now, they're being laid off. They wouldn't even know how to get a job vacuuming a rug because all they've done their lives is get coal, so they're out of work. Their job is not gone, but they're gone because there's somebody else that does not look like them who's now working their job, maybe an illegal immigrant, maybe a legal immigrant, but the person does not look like them.

Now, these are people who never had a racist bone in their body, but they're out of work, so the Klan will come into a town like that and have a rally and say, "Hey, look, the Blacks have the NAACP. The Jews have the ADL. Nobody stands up for the White man except for the Klan. Come join us. You can't even put food on your family's table. You can't put clothing on your kids' back because some so and so has your job. Come join us and we'll get your job back." These are people, like I said, who were never racist, never bigoted, and they think, "Maybe they have a point there. My job is still there, but I'm not working it. Somebody is working it for cheaper or whatever. All right. Sign up me," so they join that way, or somebody moves into a town, a small town that has a lot of clan influence in it. In order to get along in that town and do business, you join the local chamber
of commerce. You join the local country club. You join the local clan. These kinds of things would steer the conversation as to where and how I would pursue it.

Philip: In those conversations, was there a lot of common ground found in terms of --

Daryl: Yes. These are all individuals, but one common thing that they all did, just about every one of them, I would ask the questions and they would give me the answer, but they would not ask me my opinion because I'm inferior, so I have nothing to offer. I might say something like, "What do you think of when Barack Obama did such and such or Bill Clinton did this or George Bush did that?" They would tell me what they thought, but they would not say, "What do you think?" because I have nothing of value to give them. They know it all. This would be common with anybody and everybody of that mindset, but then over time, I would ask a question and they would answer it and then they would say, "Well, what do you think about it?" Oh my goodness, I finally got my foot in the door. I have some modicum of value. They really want to know my opinion and then I would venture it and they would think about it, and then we have a two-way conversation. They began respecting me as an entity that does have a brain, a brain equal or perhaps greater than their own or at least one that they should at least listen to and evaluate.

That was one common thing, but other things that we had in common that I would build upon would be for example, we all believe we need better education in schools for kids. We need to do something about the drug problem on the streets, people getting murdered over drugs. Those are things that affect their family, that affect my family, that affect anybody's family. Those are things that we have in common. If we build upon those commonalities, when you build upon those commonalities, you are forging a relationship. When you build upon that relationship, you find more commonalities and now you're forging a friendship. As you forge that friendship, the things that you had in contrast such as skin color begin to matter less and less or where you went to synagogue or church or temple or whatnot.

Sister Jenna: Thank you, Daryl. I was going to ask you about you've been doing this for 30 years now plus and we've now been witnessing Charlottesville shootings, violence on different races so to speak. I don't want to be very specific, but do you think things have changed? Is it getting better? Are we finding common ground or at least getting closer to it?

Daryl: Things are getting better and there has not really been a significant inquiry in the number of racists. People think there is because of the incidents like Charlottesville and other incidents going on all around the country, no. Those people have always been here. They've always had that mentality. Yes, there's maybe a little bump, some more recruitment or whatever, but it's not the
number or racists that has increased. It's the number of racist incidents. Racism itself has increased because of the current climate. Many of these people who were suppressed for a while now feel emboldened, now feel they have carte blanche to come out and express themselves either vocally or violently, so we're seeing that. The good thing about that is it's kind of bittersweet. That's the bitter part of it.

The sweet part of it is that now, people are forced to have this conversation, to do something about it to address this because this is our society and our society will only become one of two things. It will either become what we let it become or it will become what we make it. As a solutionary, we choose to make it become our vision. Now, we're having to address these. We see the #MeToo movement with women. We see people having more conversations about race. These conversations were taboo. People did not want to talk about them before. When I first started talking to White supremacists, people shunned me. "Oh man, Daryl's weird. We should stay away from him. He's kind of strange. He sits down with Klan people and goes to their rallies." I was being chastised. I was being made fun of. I was being called a sell-out, an Oreo and Uncle Tom, all kinds of names. Now, 30 years later, these same people are calling me, "Daryl, what are we going to do, man? You know these people. What's going on?" So now it's come full circle. Now, maybe it's time for you to get on the bandwagon and start talking to these people yourselves.

Sister Jenna: Daryl, how can we overcome some of these subliminal biases that are existing? I've gone to 93 countries. I'm half Black, half Indian. I don't know what it feels like to just be on one side of the spectrum, but then again I do. I'm on the one side of inclusivity and diversity. I have to keep checking myself if anyone who doesn't sing to that tune if there's a bias sitting there in me, so can you share with us a little bit about those subliminal ones that sometimes you don't even know that they're there, but people are telling you you need to check that.

Daryl: Yes. I believe that we all should take a step back. People will say, "I'm not racist. I don't have anything against Black people" or against Jewish people or against Muslims or what have you, but then their actions or their words indicate something different. They truly don't believe that they are biased. We have to point these things out. In the past, oftentimes we just ignore them and criticize them. They may not even know it. So when you see that happening, we need to pull those people aside and address it and say, "Hey, look, that's something that you really need to take another look at because while you may not have meant it that way, put yourself in that person's shoes." How we do that is this. I called it walking across the cafeteria. What I see so much of especially in metropolitan cities, say Washington DC or my hometown Chicago, places like that, you have companies that have a lot of diversity amongst their employees. These people work together on the same project. They may even share a cubicle together, but
what happens at 12 noon? They go downstairs in their building to the cafeteria and Blacks go sit with Blacks, Hispanics sit with Hispanics. People self-segregate. Does that mean that they're racist? No, not necessarily.

People tend to feel more comfortable around people who have some similarity. As you just pointed out, you've been at 93 different countries. You are somebody who is inclusive and that's what you feel comfortable around, so you seek out other people like that, but we need to walk across the cafeteria and sit at somebody else's table for a change because we have a lot to teach and we have a lot to learn, and that's how we do that. I guarantee if you talk with someone outside of your group, you will learn something and you will share of yourself because while you are actively learning about someone else, at the same time, you are passively teaching them about yourself. We all are individual jigsaw pieces of the puzzle and the puzzle is not beautiful until those pieces are linked together. So walk across the cafeteria every now and then and sit somewhere else with somebody who does not look like you or speak the same language.

Philip:
Okay, and those are similar ideas we've heard from others. Be curious and be willing to be uncomfortable without going into a dangerous area. I think Dereca Blackmon who was with us was saying venture out of the comfort zone into the uncomfortable zone, but don't put yourself in danger; just be curious. I am curious here. As you became friends, what shifted? Once you were friends -- I think it's obvious, but I just want to hear it from you -- how did the dynamics change and did they stay in the Klan?

Daryl:
Some become my friend while they're still in the Klan and they end up struggling because they're getting it from within, "How can you be friends with this guy? This is what you preached against. This is why I joined the Klan and you're our leader" or whatever, that kind of thing. They struggle with it in their own minds and they finally leave. When you make friends with me, you have a friend for life. Until you do me wrong or something then I might avoid you, but you have a friend for life. Here's the thing. Understand something with these kinds of groups, not just the Klan, but Neo-Nazi groups and even some Black groups and gangs. When you join these particular kinds of groups, they become your family, your first family. Now, a lot of people who join these things come from dysfunctional families, so they're more appreciative of this new family. Now, some come from perfectly fine families like my friend Arno, who you mentioned earlier. He came from a perfectly fine family. He had an alcoholic father, but other than that, he was raised not to be racist, so you have all kinds.

But when you join this group or any group like that, that becomes your family and you've more or less taken an oath to always stand by that family and they will always stand by you. Then you acquire a stigma from other people outside that family, even your own family and your friends. "Oh, that person is a racist. I
don't want to be associated with him. He's a Klan member. I don't want to associate with him. I'm ashamed that my daughter or my son joined some White-power, skin-headed group." You disassociate. Now, you have that stigma and it's a stigma that you become proud of while you're in your new family because that's all they preach to you. That's your badge of honor. Now over time, you finally come to your senses and you realize, "You know what, I've been wrong. I need to get out of this." So when you exit, you are hanging out there by yourself because the people that you forsake earlier on who gave you the stigma, they don't want you. Even the term ex-clan member can carry a negative connotation. They're not sure, "Did he really change? Maybe it's better to leave him alone." They don't take you back and now your family that you abandoned, the racist family, they're out to get you because you have betrayed them, so you're hanging out there by yourself. That's where I come in because I will take you in. I will be your friend. I will stand behind you and that's what they appreciate. That's how that works.

Sister Jenna: That's exactly how I expected our conversation to have gone where you gave us insights and steps to take because we are witnessing a time period that we have not, at least my generation, we haven't. I think parents, Daryl, are just struggling with what to tell their children and how to tell them because the children of today are just a little bit like, "Why can't we all get along?" and then they look at the news and they're seeing a different story, so thank you, thank you, thank you. The next time we get you on the Summer of Peace Summit, you've got to play your piano with fire blazing.

Daryl: You've got it. Absolutely.

Sister Jenna: It's been fantastic. Thanks so much. Philip, do you have any closing remarks?

Philip: Yeah, just also thank you for your presence, your experience, sharing the wisdom from your experience, definitely hearing about curiosity, compassion, education, learning, and also courage, courage for everyone, so it's a courageous act to find common ground.

Daryl: Well, thank you. Let me say this too. We need to stop talking about each other, stop talking at each other, and stop talking past each other. Let's start talking with each other because remember this. When two enemies are talking, they're not fighting. They might be yelling and screaming and beating their fists on the table to make a point, but at least they're talking. It's when the talking stops, it's when the conversation stops, the ground becomes fertile for violence, so let's keep the conversation going.

Philip: That sounds great. Wonderful! Thank you, Daryl and Sister Jenna. Thank you, everyone, for joining. We'd love to hear your comments, so go to The Shift
Network Facebook page or what other social media and use #SummerOfPeace, so thank you all. Stay tuned for more.

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