

Christian Muslim Report

As believers in the Messiah, and in accordance with the life and teaching of Jesus, we are commanded to try and live at peace with everyone around us (Romans 12:18). In this passage Paul is instructing us to be active in reaching out to the community surrounding us. As a result, Musalaha has initiated a bridge-building program designed to reach the greater society around us here in the Holy Land. We have developed a methodology based on shared moral values which are common to all



three monotheistic religions in the region: Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. This program is being carried out in cooperation with Musalaha, Rev. Brian Cox of the International Center for Religion and Diplomacy, and Pepperdine University. The following report is from a recent Christian-Muslim Desert Encounter in Wadi Rum, Jordan.

In recent years Musalaha has made an effort to build bridges between the Palestinian Christians and the Palestinian Muslims. This effort has been, for the most part, aimed at the leadership of these two communities, in the Bethlehem area. In spite of the humble scope of this project, we are now beginning to see results, and are reaping the benefits.

This year we are working with our third group in three years, and unlike the previous two groups, this one is full of younger professionals, doctors, lawyers, and architects, instead of religious and political leaders. This group has already been to the desert together, already begun to develop relationships, and has already had exposure to the principles of reconciliation and the teaching we do with Rev. Brian Cox on shared moral values. Their familiarity with us and with each other made our recent follow up meeting in Cyprus especially beneficial. They had already moved past the initial stages, and were ready to deal earnestly with the issues that separate them.

One of the activities was to separate the participants into a Muslim and Christian group, and to answer a few questions. Each group was asked to list their grievances toward the other side, as well as the offenses they see themselves committing against the other side. This self-reflective questioning yielded some

very interesting results. For the most part, the offenses that the Christian group complained about were predicted by the Muslim group, and the offenses that the Muslim group mentioned were anticipated by the Christian group. There were no major surprises. The Muslim group complained of being looked down upon by the Christians and being discriminated against because of their religion. The Christian group complained about Muslims treating them as outsiders, foreign westerners who do not believe in God. They also complained of Islamic intolerance of their religious feasts and rituals.

From this exercise we were able to observe a number of things. First of all, we saw an unprecedented honesty and willingness on

both sides to look unflinchingly at their own faults and shortcomings. The group was not defensive, and was able to understand and even predict where the other side was coming from. This was very significant because it means that they have learned about each other, and their relationships have deepened and developed. This is a result of the desert encounter trip they went on together, but also of their meetings with each other which have taken place regularly since the desert trip. They now have a much better understanding of each other's grievances and the way they are seen by each other. This understanding is crucial to reconciliation as it facilitates empathy.

We also asked both groups to present a representation of their identity through drama, using the methods of the Theatre of the Oppressed. The Theatre of the Oppressed is a form of interactive, drama-based theatrical techniques which encourage equal participation from the actors and the audience, and is a very effective way of generating discussion of issues such as power, coercion, conflict, and social interaction. This exercise was very interesting and produced great results, and was facilitated by Janne Bjerkholt, a Norwegian working with the Palestinian Bible Society, and focused on the idea of narrative. This session was a great way to release tension and delve deeper into our discussions.

In trying to figure out how to represent its identity, the Muslim group engaged in a very animated discussion. They wanted to be sure

that the messages of inclusion, peace, and freedom came across. They made a very big effort, and it was obvious that they were concerned with countering the image of Islam as a closed, intolerant, and violent religion. They created a big circle, with a section that was missing, meant to indicate that their community was incomplete without the Christians. They also had most of the people in the circle facing outwards, to indicate their openness to the world and to others, but a few were facing inwards, representing the fundamentalists.

It was a very difficult process, but both sides benefited from this exercise. They had to look honestly at the problems in their own society, something which is never easy to do. It is always much more simple to find fault with the other side. In the Christian group, the men and women mixed more naturally, but for the Muslim group gender became a bit of an issue. There was a discussion about what the place of women should be within their group and within their society. Still, in the end, the women played a big role in coming up with the ideas for the Muslim group's representation. The Christian group also had an interesting discussion when it was their turn to represent their identity. They expressed a very strong historical and religious attachment to the land, and pride in their Arab heritage and values of non-violence and freedom, but they also stressed the divisions within their community.

Overall both groups were very engaged in this exercise and throughout our meeting. They were open with each other, and seemed very determined to continue with the process of reconciliation. The questions, "Why are we not together? What is standing in our way?" kept coming up, and it seemed clear that they wanted to learn about each other and have unity. Both sides seemed to want to maintain their authenticity and represent their true identity, but were also aware of how they are perceived, and wanted to include the other side and avoid offending them. These are all signs of real progress, and the members of the group were also encouraged. They decided to begin a program of reaching out to the local Palestinian youth, and teaching them what they have learned, through schools, community centers and clubs. This is the best way to ensure that the project of reconciliation will continue with the next generation.

By Salim J. Munayer
Edited by Joshua Korn

Munayer Family News

Summer has truly passed. Our family had a good one, escaping the heat for a month. Everybody but Jack went to the UK, and did many activities, including 5 days in Ireland.

So like I said, everyone but Jack went to the UK, but, don't feel sorry for him, he spent two weeks in Washington State with Musalaha's Sand and Sound Encounter, and they spoiled him rotten! Since returning to Israel, Salim has been to Cyprus and South Africa. He brought back two noisy vevuzzala's for John and Sam who have been testing them out [annoyingly] on the balcony and assure me people can hear them one mile away. Ha! I think one continent away is more like it.

Since returning to Jerusalem I've been cupboard cleaning my house and my soul. House purging is what I call it and family members are desperately hiding items so I won't throw them out. For soul cleansing I've stopped all previous activities to wait and hear and see what exactly God wants me to do. I am listening and am beginning to get the picture. This is a process and to my surprise an exciting one. Meanwhile the wheels of family life whirl on, especially with four fabulous boys.

Jack, 21, after working several Musalaha camps, helping the office move around the corner to a larger space [schlepping boxes], Jack has finally begun his studies at The University of York in the UK, studying Sociology and Psychology. It hasn't been easy sailing. He is an International student without any money! A month has passed and it looks like [from the Spartan e-mails] he is settling in a bit better. He is having culture shock, life shock, growing up shock, whatever shock and it takes time to adjust. One amazing (co) God-

incidence is that he met a student who was born in Israel; I attended his mother's baby shower and prayed for him much before and after he was born. Jack is giving him Hebrew lessons....who would have thought? Musalaha again! Jack is able to try things he has not had the opportunity to do before like under water hockey and fencing. Good for him.

Daniel, 18 3/4, graduated with a 2 percent average higher than Jack, since his goal was to beat his brother! Whatever the motive, he finished with high marks! After volunteering with the elderly in the UK he started a YWAM course in Colorado Springs, USA. He is thriving, having a blast, learning, enjoying himself being 18 and energetic. He will soon leave for 4 months to work with underprivileged children/adults in two locations which will be revealed later. We miss Daniel's chatter and stream of friends he used to bring home. When Daniel and Jack left, I lost two drivers and two meaty youths who carry my things up and down the 40 stairs to our home. Pretty selfish thing to say, but true!

John, 16 3/4, now the oldest child at home and finding that balance between school, exams, driving lessons, swimming, youth activities, and parties. He is now acing his exams; he even got 100 on a Hebrew language exam which has gone down in the Munayer family archives as a first [including Salim]. With these kinds of results, his wonderful faith and kind manner we can't complain. May it all continue. Mind you he did forget his keys and money going on the school trip this morning and I had to return home at 6 a.m. to get them. Oh yes and John swam in the Nationals this summer and came in 8th in all races improv-

ing his times. Amazing.

Sam, 12 3/4, loves being a part of the high school under the watchful eye and protection of John [who is a pest as well]. Sam came in 4th in the nationals in several races this summer and is determined to get medals next time. He weighs and measures himself daily it seems, waiting for that growth spurt is hard. Sam is growing up though and he is well into his pre-teens or teens, it all seems the same to me. You know when they're argumentative, stropky, sulky, charming and cute at the same time. Fast forward 4 years please. Sam is still Susu's favorite person, chirping happily when he comes out of his bedroom every morning.

I know I sound biased about these boys, but they are really amazing though. I feel very grateful or especially thankful for them and the way they live their lives. Who could wish for more? A daughter? No way. I wouldn't trade any of them!

I [we] look forward to Christmas, which includes a visit from Jack, and very minimal bazaar participation.

What will the future hold? Who knows but the slight rattle of the wind of change is evident. The reduction of household chores with two children being away is delightful and a relief. Buying 8 yogurts a week instead of 40 is helping the fridge work more quietly and the reduction of washing, cleaning, cooking and I could go on and on is let's just say *wonderful*.

That's it for now, thanks for listening, love getting feedback, keep praying, and will keep you informed.

Kay Munayer [for all the family]



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Philippians 2 – Humility

In recent Musalaha meetings we have been reflecting on Philippians chapter 2, where Paul writes about Jesus coming to earth. This act was very significant, as it required him to give up his position of authority, power and glory in God's heavenly kingdom. All the riches of heaven were at his disposal, but instead he lowered himself and became a slave on our behalf. Philippians 2:7 says that he "made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men." The creator made himself into one of the created.

This is an important point to remember, especially as we are coming into the Christmas season, which is marked by commemorating the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem. He came to earth as a human, vulnerably and humbly. He was born in a stable among animals and shepherds. In the Middle East (ancient and modern), hospitality is one of the most important cultural values, so this theme of humility reverberates even more. To turn away anyone, let alone a pregnant woman, is almost unthinkable, and yet this is how Jesus came into the world. He came, not as a warrior or king, demanding power and recognition, but as the son of a humble carpenter. Jesus emptied himself of all that was royal and princely. He took on human flesh, and "be-

ing found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross." (Philippians 2:8) Jesus did all of this willingly, in order to provide us with a salvation we do not deserve.

The incarnation of Christ is also essential to the process of reconciliation, because in order to reconcile with our enemies, we also need to humble ourselves. Jesus provided us with the perfect example to follow in this regard. In our country right now, the situation is very difficult. People on both sides of the political divide are demanding recognition without being willing to give it. People are demanding recognition of their identity, and of their rights. They are demanding recognition of their political or theological opinions, and they are putting all of this recognition as a precondition for fellowship. We all think that we are right and that others who disagree with us are wrong. This is completely normal. However, we cannot make the mistake of refusing to fellowship with others just because they disagree with us. We must remain humble, and open to the possibility that we are wrong. Paul writes, "Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself" (Philippians 2:3).

Part of our human nature is to

constantly seek more power and privilege. We are always trying to improve our situation by getting a better passport, or getting into a better school, we are always looking out for a better job, a bigger salary, or a bigger house. But if we look at the example Jesus set, we see that he went in the opposite direction. Instead of seeking more, he freely gave up the privileges and power he had, and lowered himself to the level of a human slave. In order to reach us, and to reconcile humankind and God, Jesus came down to our level, and removed every obstacle standing in our way, barring us from God. We must do the same. We need to reach out to our enemies, go where they are and meet them there. We are not above anyone else, and we should not be above meeting with anyone else,

especially our brothers and sisters in the Messiah. Above all, it is our duty to seek fellowship and reconciliation with each other.

The conditions of our conflict separated us from each other, and our anger and fear keep this separation intact, but we are called to be different, and to challenge and change the world by our example. We are to be "blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation," and we are to "shine as lights in the world." (Philippians 2:15). Humble and vulnerable as the baby-king, this is how we will change the world.

By Salim J. Munayer
Edited by Joshua Korn



Thank you for praying with us!
This is a glimpse into our

New Office!



*To make a secure online donation, visit www.musalaha.org

Conflict Transformation: "Sound and Sand Encounter"

What a unique privilege to accompany and serve 27 young disciples of the Messiah in our recent Musalaha initiative to the Pacific North West of the United States. The leadership team was made up of Evan and Maala Thomas



(from the Israeli Messianic community) and Tanas Al Quassis and Nussi Khalil (from the Palestinian Christian community). With us were 18 carefully selected young adults, many of them meeting one another for the first time. A further 9 young American Christians and 2 leaders (Shari Monson and Lance Brown) joined us upon our arrival in Washington State and within 24 hours we set off for the mountains for a week of wilderness experience.

So began stage one of an amazing project we have entitled "Sound and Sand": "Sound" because our host church, Chapel Hill Presbyterian of Gig Harbor is situated on the beautiful Puget Sound and "Sand" because stage two will take place in the desert of Wadi Ram during the Passover holidays of April 2011.

Our hosts have committed to this project out of a desire to "sow into" the spiritual lives of the young people of our conflicted communities by allowing us, as teachers, to expose them to the ethics of biblical reconciliation.

As such, their young people have an opportunity to take part in this crucial process and to experience what we believe to be an essential element of the Christian/Messianic walk. We applaud the courageous initiative of Chapel Hill for their significant investment, both in terms of manpower and finances. This was the first time we have experienced a single church community take on such an undertaking, with a heart to make a difference in our troubled region.

We in the Musalaha team traveled out with some apprehension – would the American experience be conducive to

our reconciliation process, and would the young Americans truly have a role to play? From the very first day on "the mountain" our young participants did not hold back but entered with full hearts into true Godly fellowship with one another. Despite our apprehension we quickly saw that our role was simply to provide some basic biblical tools and a safe framework for these wonderful young people to experience all that God desired for them.

Beautiful forest trails, glacial streams and flower-filled mountain meadows gladdened our hearts. Challenged by God's word various exercises such as theater, group discussions and prayer, we watched as young lives were transformed all around us. This unique process of mutual discovery, crossing sectarian barriers, real or imaginary is very precious.

As facilitators our own lives were spiritually impacted as we witnessed our Palestinian and Israeli young people cross cultural and community borders and begin to discover their bonds of family and friendship as brothers and sisters in the Lord. As feelings of safety and confidence grew among the group members, so too did the freedom to share their respective burdens and challenges with one another.

Understandably, emotions arose but without being expressed in condemnation or humiliation. Time and again we witnessed the unspoken role of the American participants emerge. Rather than functioning as awkward bystanders, these sensitive young people allowed the Lord to guide them as "timely" mediators in group discussions, where tears of shame or anger were quickly replaced by those of love and mutual support.

A lot of fun, laughter and great food are

also essential tools in the reconciliation process (Proverbs 17:22). Each respective group was given the responsibility to prepare a cultural evening, complete with festive meals and traditions synonymous with our communities. What joy as we entered into the excitement of our Palestinian wedding and our Friday night Kabbalat Shabbat and enjoyed the many treats of our traditional American Thanksgiving. In so doing we were able to experience something of one another's worlds and with that a growing appreciation and understanding of one another.

Theatre too enabled us to allow the "creative juices" to flow as we worked



together to make statements about the world in which we live. Dramatic movement is rapidly proving to be a valuable and safe way of expressing the painful aspects of the "human condition" in light of our faith. We can surely look forward to developing this in the desert in a few months time.

The question of how we would sustain our newly formed relationships was answered within the first few days: Facebook, emails and Skype of course. These are the blessings of living in our modern world. It has been wonderful seeing the exchange of photos, emails and notes of love and encouragement between them all (us included). In every way, this first stage of the encounter has clearly been an overwhelming success. We will enter the desert during the Passover of 2011 on "sound footing" and in warm anticipation of Jesus' amazing grace...

By Evan Thomas
Musalaha Chairman of the Board

Narratives through film

Israeli-Palestinian Young Adult Follow-Up

I recently participated in Musalaha's follow up meeting for young adults. Around 30 of us met up at the Talitha Kumi school in Beit Jala for a weekend of viewing and discussing Israeli and Palestinian films. This was a first for Musalaha, but seemed like a good way to follow up on the Historical Narrative conference that took place last spring. After all, movies have become a dominant part of our national narratives, and in many ways shape the way we view our history and ourselves. They are a visual and virtual articulation of our collective identities.

We decided that by watching each other's films, we would be able to learn more about each other's culture, society, and history, which is a sign of a deepening relationship. As we come to know each other better, we cannot help but gain empathy for each other and broaden our perspective. Obviously the choice of which films to show was very important, and we encountered a few difficulties during the selection process. Originally our goal was to pick films which deal exclusively with culture and society, and show what regular life is like as an Israeli or a Palestinian. We wanted to avoid films about the conflict because we were afraid that the political element would crowd out the other aspects of the discussion. The only problem was we could not find any films which did not deal with the conflict! This is more true of Palestinian films than of Israeli films, but it was also important to have relative balance on this issue. So in the end we picked films which do deal with the conflict, but which are also self-reflective, and have a

lot to say about Israeli and Palestinian culture.

For the Israeli film we picked *Waltz with Bashir*. The Palestinian film we chose was *Paradise Now*. These films are very different from each other, but they are also similar in many ways. They are both inward-facing films, seeking to address internal issues within Israeli and Palestinian societies. They also both place a great deal of emphasis on the personal, psychological factors which play into the way people respond to conflict and impossible situations. After these two films we also watched *Ajami*, which is about Palestinians and Israelis (as well as Palestinian Israelis), their interactions and the ways in which their lives intertwine. This film was interesting because it presented characters from both sides as real people, not cartoon stereotypes, and shows that sometimes even good people do bad things, and "bad" people may have good reasons for doing what they do.

I had seen all of these films before this follow up meeting. I had even seen them recently, since I watched them all again the week before the meeting in preparation. However, watching them in a room full of Israelis and Palestinians was an entirely different viewing experience. It was intense to say the least, and very powerful. Suddenly you are aware of everyone else in the room. You wonder about their reactions, and how they feel about a certain scene. Are they laughing or crying? Are they interested? Bored? Sleeping? Is that person walking out of the room in anger or just going to the bathroom?



Following each film we had a discussion, which was very interesting and really added to the viewing. I was impressed by the insights people shared and observations they made. The discussions were led by Bara'a Deeb, a Palestinian Israeli from Nazareth who studies Film at Tel Aviv University. She began each session by commenting on the cinematic and artistic aspects of the film, which kept our discussion from jumping straight into the political content of the films, and

allowed for a more objective and dispassionate analysis. We talked about the symbolism, the colors, and the soundtrack, as well as other elements. This approach enabled everyone to talk about the films, and discuss the different elements, even if they disagreed with them, or were offended by them, without taking offense. Eventually we did move on to talk about the political, and the conflict, but by that time the tone of our discussion had already been set, and it was intelligent, respectful, and searching.

Near the end of our weekend we split the participants up into an Israeli group and a Palestinian group for an activity. We asked the Israeli group to make a poster for *Paradise Now*, and the Palestinian group to make a poster for *Waltz with Bashir*. This activity was very interesting, and allowed each group to really focus on internalizing the meaning and message of the different films. It made them think about what the other side was trying to say. Then by presenting the finished posters, each group was able to show the other side that they had been heard, and that their narrative had been understood.

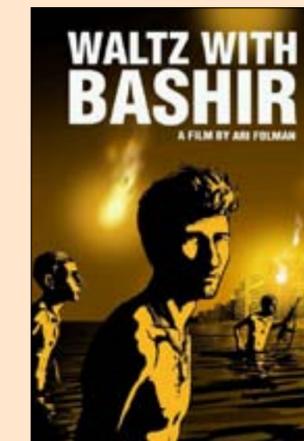


A group of 40 Palestinian and Israeli youth begin the reconciliation journey on a Swiss adventure.

Both groups displayed great insight as they engaged with the films they represented in their posters, and really attempted to capture the essence of the film, as well as present some of the issues the film deals with. This was very validating for both groups, and allowed for some creative expression which facilitated the process of digesting these difficult films.

By the end of our short meeting, everyone was exhausted. You would think that spending a weekend watching movies would be easy, but it is amazing how difficult it was. These were not just any movies, and it was not just any crowd. By the end, everyone was emotionally drained. But in a good way. It was as though their efforts had contributed to something bigger, and more transcendent than themselves, a great conversation back and forth. The difference this time was that we were engaged in an exchange, not a monologue. Watching films together became a way to communicate with each other, a way to articulate things which are hard to say. It is thrilling when you see something on the screen that you identify with. You say, "This speaks for me!" But it is also poignant when other voices speak, leaving you condemned, excluded, or silenced. In other words it is honest, and true to life. This weekend was one more step in a long process of learning to speak to each other.

By Joshua Korn
Musalaha Publications Manager



Please Keep Salim's Trip to the US in your prayers. The following is a tentative schedule...please contact us for further details.

Tentative Schedule

Texas - March 16-18

California - March 19-20

Washington State - March 21-23

Trinity Western University - March 24 - 28