Growing Up

This January, Musalaha held its annual Youth Winter Trip with a group of 20 Palestinian and Israeli youth. Musalaha gathered the young people from Bethlehem, Jerusalem and Nazareth and travelled to the unique village of Hadera The, in the north of Israel. This community maintains an atmosphere in which “people of all others, social and religious backgrounds are welcome and required as equals,” promoting a compassionate environment for Musalaha youth to bond with each other. For many of the best of the group,” they were meeting face to face. Palestinian Christian and Messianic Jewish youth live in different cities, mostly far away from each other. Without Musalaha brokered arrangements it, the chances of their meeting is low. Jewish youth live in different cities, mostly far away from each other. Without Musalaha arranging it, the chances of their meeting is low.

Language is a social obstacle. In their homes and schools they study and are exposed to Hebrew. This creates significant barriers. Arabic is also a language to be studied as a common language. Even if the youth are brought up speaking each other’s language, they do not necessarily use it. The leaders observed that throughout the meeting it was clear that even if they are not afraid of the youth, they often experience trust and doubt in getting to know people from the other side.

On the last bocce the teenagers began getting to know one another, mostly within their ethnic groups. This is part of the purpose of the week and how playing games some youth were bonding, while others are not. Some participating youth mentioned that lack of trust and understanding can make it hard for youth to reach out to one another. But when they did something together, the youth started speaking. For some youth they were bonding, while others were not. Some preferred being on their phones or stuck to the one thing they were meeting face to face. Palestinian Christian and Messianic Jewish youth live in different cities, mostly far away from each other. Without Musalaha brokered arrangements it, the chances of their meeting is low. Jewish youth live in different cities, mostly far away from each other. Without Musalaha arranging it, the chances of their meeting is low.

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With Obstacles

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There are many components of the situation. One of the Israeli participants said that the Israeli women who come to Musalaha to share their stories, and are just a part of the Israeli side on the other hand, thought that this is a personal problem that they have to solve. "It is a personal problem and I have to deal with it myself," she said. However, when they met at the designated point and drove together to the school, she and a few of the other Jewish women had a lot of trouble getting into a Palestinian town in the West Bank. She and her friends had to go through checkpoints and show their identification. Recently, one day, it was very easy to go to the school and she and her friends were walking at the front outside the building. To go to the school, they had to walk up the stairs and present their permits to the Israeli security officer. She said, "Your hands in your pockets! What can we do? Just don't put your hands in your pockets?" Her story reminded the group about the existence of restrictions in the lives of Israelis.

In reply, an Israeli participant shared that her story highlighted the emotional and psychological barriers on her own. "I have to go through any checkpoint to get to work. But, her taxes are paid and she can work, and then I realized that I should take my hands out of my pockets. Over the years, as a minority people group in the violent, unstable Middle East, many Israelis feel an existential threat to their existence. It is also understandable for these Israelis to think, "Is it really worth it to put your hands in your pockets?" Her story reminded the group about the emotional and psychological barriers on her own.

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