

# What's new at Musalaha?



1. This month we say a **bittersweet goodbye** to our long-serving volunteer, Jemma. We hope that she returns to Oceania with positive experiences, new insight, and good friends that she met through her time volunteering with us.

2. This December is full of events for Musalaha's women's groups. We are having a conference on trauma, a worship night for new participants, and regular meetings of local groups. Please pray that these events will produce fruit that will spread to other women in our communities.

3. Hear what Israeli and Palestinian believing youth have to say about reconciliation at Musalaha's youth blog at [musalahayouth.blogspot.co.il](http://musalahayouth.blogspot.co.il). Musalaha is also developing a youth curriculum for reconciliation. For more information, please contact us at [musalaha@netvision.net.il](mailto:musalaha@netvision.net.il).

4. Once again, Musalaha is joining local Messianic Jewish and Palestinian congregations in Jerusalem for our **third bilingual worship night**. We hope for an event similar to last year's, with 300 attendees bringing in the New Year in unity.



## understanding israeli & palestinian youth (continued)

Israeli-Palestinians are part of the state of Israel geographically and legally, yet they are excluded from national expression as the flag, anthem and ideology of the state, among other things, fail to represent them. Israeli-Palestinian youth comprise nearly twenty-six percent of Israel's child population. Three central themes in their master narrative are: discrimination and subordination; hyphenation and double marginality; and existential insecurity. The first theme describes their unequal rights as a minority. The second theme describes the challenge they face in identifying with either their civic (Israeli) or cultural (Palestinian) identity; they encounter a measure of exclusion from both Israeli and Palestinian communities. Their existential security results from Israel's attempts to strip them of their Palestinian national and cultural identity through "Israelization" in school curricula. Israeli-Palestinian school curricula do not allow them to study Palestinian culture prior to 1948, and in addition, they study the Israeli narrative of history.

Psychologist Judy Kuriansky suggests several steps for changing the attitude of each group. The first step is to stop delegitimizing the enemy, which is done by relating to one another as human beings. This can be accomplished through meeting one another and developing relationships. Next, working on joint projects together can aid in working toward reconciliation as a common goal helps break down physical and psychological barriers. Encouraging dialogue aimed at dealing with deeper issues helps each party voice its hurts and concerns, allowing time for listening and further engagement to take place. Finally, reducing collective fear, anger and hatred is possible not only through reconciliation, but also through thoughtful contemplation and self-healing which can be done when it is not possible to meet with the other group. In our Christian context, we find that this is achieved through prayer and proper teaching on forgiveness.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict influences this region's youth culture tremendously. The master narratives currently in place

legitimize opposed claims and foster existential insecurity. Delegitimization of the other's identity is a common theme in Israeli and Palestinian societies, and Israeli-Palestinians deal with the challenge of falling between these two conflicting cultures. Though there are a number of organizations in Israel and Palestine that attempt to encourage positive interaction between these three groups, there is still much work to be done. In our context working with Messianic Jews and Palestinian Christians, we find the need to discuss these issues while meeting the spiritual needs and challenges of our youth and youth leaders. There is a need to teach our youth leaders how to deal with authority in a Biblical context, as well as how to address theological differences in youth groups. We at Musalaha are trying to address this through developing a youth leader's curriculum which will teach youth leaders how to better communicate with youth, and deal with the issues we face in the believing community and our conflict-ridden society.

-Musalaha Publications Department

## Munayer family update

This time I, Salim, will be writing the family update, so it won't be as funny. Over the years our home has been busy and noisy with four active boys, but recently we have found ourselves with almost an empty nest.

Jack is in his third and final year at York University, and as a father I have the challenge to learn how to speak into the life of a very educated young man. He now needs to decide what he will do next.

I traveled with Daniel and helped him settle in at American University where

he is studying in the Global Scholar's program in the school of international studies. I've been pleasantly surprised at his excellent grades.

John left for YWAM in South Africa and I am so happy for him as it is a place where he needs to be. He is in a Discipleship Training School and he will be going to India for his outreach early next year.

Sam is the one we feel the most for, as he is the youngest of four, and suddenly he is by himself. It is a difficult adjustment for the three of us at home, and for him in

particular. He is growing so fast, and he is dedicated to his swimming and studies. Kay's involvement in helping the poor is increasing, and I believe that God will open new doors for her to bless people.

As for me, the last three months were very busy teaching, studying, researching and traveling, and the highlight of it was teaching Musalaha's "A Curriculum of Reconciliation" at Fuller Theological Seminary. I was personally encouraged to see how our work in the past few years is bearing fruit throughout the world.

-Salim

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## PENETRATING THE WALLS OF FEAR

In a recent staff meeting we read Henri Nouwen's chapter entitled "A Suffocating Loneliness" from his book *Reaching Out*. He discusses how many of us have a deep fear of rejection which is rooted in loneliness, and we try and fill our lives with entertainment and distraction to avoid the feeling of being alone. When others seek to inflict pain and punishment on us, they deprive us of their attention, their time, and their intimacy. As a result of fear, many Western societies fill their schedules, avoiding truly free time. In our Middle Eastern context, instead of filling our day with "things to do," we often surround ourselves with our community, but even when we are together, we feel alone. When we have free time in education and in our daily lives, we allow it to become filled with competition and rivalry or empty chatter. We are afraid of being still, and realizing that maybe, we are alone.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is not only an issue of denial of resources, but there is a desire to deny each other the right for intimacy and love. We do this by denying the identity and existence of the other. We speak ill of the other, we delegitimize their claims, and we demonize them. And this is often just as hurtful, if not more hurtful, than the conflict over resources as it cuts to the core of who we are.

The message of Christmas is that God is present, and God is close. God is not far away

and isolated; he comes and he steps into his creation. He comes to be with us. He does not impose himself. He comes gently, quietly, vulnerably as a baby. People who are hurting, rejected and fearful need not be threatened. God's love and gift penetrate our walls of fear, and he comes to indwell us. When we feel secure and accepted, we are able to turn to others, accepting and embracing them.

As violence escalates in our region, many Palestinians and Israelis are suffering in Gaza and Israel. We ask that you keep our leaders and people in prayer. Some people on both sides have died, and many are suffering physically, emotionally, and psychologically. Please pray for Israelis and Palestinians in harm's way; wisdom for our leaders as their decisions impact hundreds and thousands of people. Please also pray and for the local believers on both sides. It is critical that precisely at this time our response to the conflict would be an encouragement and blessing to our neighbors.

We are encouraged to see that in these times when the conflict has a real and violent presence, Israeli and Palestinian Musalaha participants are answering the call of being a blessing to the other side. Instead of espousing hate and disunity through social media, they have used it as a tool to spread encouragement. An Israeli recently asked the Musalaha young adults' internet group to not lose sight of Jesus' teachings of love

in these tough times. In the same forum, a Palestinian stressed the importance of identifying with the other side by watching their news and praying for their civilians. These messages are meaningful rays of hope shining through the current darkness. It tells those that are supposed to be the enemy: there are people on the other side that care about you and your people; you are not alone.

We would like to wish you all a wonderful holiday season. We hope that you will feel God's presence with you as you celebrate with your families.

-Salim J. Munayer, Director  
and the Musalaha staff

in this issue...

NOTHING SHORT OF A  
MIRACLE

SHARING OUR  
NARRATIVES

UNDERSTANDING YOUTH



From August 14-25 we took a group of six Palestinian, seven Israeli and three Musalaha youth leaders to Holland where we met up with six Dutch youth and five Dutch leaders. We stayed in Helvoirt and combined teachings with relationship building exercises and outings. We learned about what conflict and reconciliation are, and studied cross-cultural communication, identity, and hope. Our youth enjoyed singing in three languages during the worship sessions, playing games with each other, getting to know one another, and spending free time in between sessions just hanging out.

On one of the first days an Israeli participant commented, "I learned that hatred and violence affects negatively my own peace of mind," and a Palestinian participant commented, "You can't expect to have the same opinion all the time because the more you listen to other people's points of view, the more you find sense in what they are saying. You must keep an open mind." Toward the end of the trip, another Palestinian participant stated, "Even in painful and hard moments, we need to forgive, because God is forgiveness." An Israeli participant responded, "When we are together, our life is so much better."

We were blessed to have many European churches and other organizations that participated in this reconciliation encounter with Musalaha and helped make it possible. They are St. John and St. Philip Anglican Church in The Hague, The Holy Trinity Church in Brussels, Crossroads International Church of The Hague, and Tabitha Ministry in the Netherlands.

*One of the Dutch leaders with us on this event, Caroline Candelaria, shares a short reflection on the trip here.*



What happens when you put seven Jewish, six Palestinian and six European students together in an old monastery for 12 days in the south of Holland? In some contexts that would have been a recipe for disaster; each person with his own understanding and interpretation of the conflict and feelings of entitlement and desire for restitution. Then you add a common denominator – a belief in Jesus Christ as the Messiah, the Righteous Judge and the Great Comforter - and what you have is nothing short of a miracle.

not exist," and "You're all terrorists." Yet, at the end of the day, these very same youth would stand in a big circle holding each other tightly, with tears running down their faces, asking God to shower us with humility and love for one another. If that's not a miracle straight from heaven, I don't know what is.

During those twelve days we ate, played, lived and laughed together, as well as enjoyed sessions on God's heart for reconciliation. We participated in exercises that pushed most of us way beyond our comfort zones – to that scary, yet beautiful place where we are able to see each other through God's eyes.

We know it most likely will not immediately change the political aspect of the conflict, but we all agree that as believers we are called to a higher standard – of stepping

beyond the conflict and actively seeking out reconciliation, offering forgiveness and grace, and pursuing unity in the Body. And perhaps this generation will not see the full fruit of its labor, but the next generation will be one step closer to saying, "What, our grandparents used to hate each other?" I pray this will be the generation of Christ-followers that will bring Heaven's Kingdom closer still – by loving recklessly.

These teens quickly became some of my favorite heroes and I ask you to join me in standing with them in asking God that the seed that has been planted on neutral ground would take root and continue to mature. In spite of their minority status in their families, schools and communities, they return with a message of forgiveness and love. Forgiving will not change the past, but it sure will change the future.

## SHARING OUR Narratives

This past October Shadia and I had the opportunity to present the Israeli and Palestinian narratives of our history and conflict to a group of 22 Muslim and Christian women in Beit Sahour. Having a meeting like this in the Palestinian Territories with this group of women was quite an accomplishment! As difficult as it is for our Christian Palestinian sisters to meet with we Israelis, it is even more difficult for Muslim Palestinians. Their sole interaction with Jews is often with Israeli soldiers and security personnel along the borders of the West Bank and Jerusalem. These Palestinian women have had little opportunity to hear the Jewish narrative, and they often only hear one perspective from their media and government.

As prepared as we could be, Shadia and I both walked into that meeting with a sense of trepidation. Shadia presented the Palestinian narrative from 1834 on – how the Palestinians lived, their reaction to the British and Ottoman control of Palestinian lands, how Palestinians reacted to early Jewish emigration, and the establishment of Israel. Most of the women were familiar with this information, and they listened intently, eager to add points they knew as well. When Shadia finished, she began to critique the Palestinian account, countering some of the accepted narrative that is historically inaccurate. At this point, many of the women were very defensive. Shadia challenged the idea that Palestinians were innocent in the conflict leading up to 1948, mentioning some of the massacres Palestinians perpetrated against Jewish civilians. She also challenged the idea that the Zionists/Jews are always to blame, referencing the failures of Palestinian leadership in a number of cases. These women had been taught that Palestinians were always the victim, and to hear that this is not always the case was new and shocking to them. At the same time, they agreed that Palestinian leadership did not always act in their best interests, and were willing to engage in a measure of self-criticism.

Then, it was my turn to present the Israeli-Jewish historical narrative. I was nervous. This was the first time most of these women

would hear an Israeli-Jew present a subject like this. Would they jump up and leave? Shadia introduced me, and I began by asking the women to let me finish, and then I would address all of their questions.

I spoke about the various peoples who persecuted the Jews throughout the centuries, and while they listened respectfully, I could see that this made the women uncomfortable. One woman asked me why, if the Jews were treated so badly by other nations, could they then turn around and treat the Palestinian nation with discrimination? For that, I had no answer. When I began to discuss the development of Zionism and the reasons behind it, I could see that they had not thought of this before. Due to time limitations, I finished my presentation with the establishment of Israel, and then I began to critique the narrative I presented. Israeli educational institutions teach Israelis some inaccurate information about our history, and I challenged the commonly-thought Israeli notion that Palestine was a land without a people, and the myth that Arabs fled their homes in 1948 because other Arabs asked them to do so. These critiques of my own side gave me more credibility in the women's eyes. When the women responded, many stated that they did not agree with what I told them. That is fine, as I did not expect to change their perspectives, but to present them with some new information.

The women had a number of questions for me regarding Judaism and the conflict, and I tried to answer the best that I could while representing the various opinions common in Israeli society. This meeting left us all with more questions than answers, but it was a new experience for all of us, one marked by respect. This was the greatest accomplishment of the event: one side listened to the narrative of the other with open ears. We all had time to express ourselves and our opinions, and as a result we left after hearing one another and being heard.

*-Hedva Haymov, Women's Department*



*Images from Israeli Aliyah and from the Palestinian Nakba, which represent key elements in the Israeli and Palestinian narratives.*

## understanding israeli & palestinian youth

Over the next several months we have a team of writers working on a youth leader's curriculum. We have found that there are a lot of materials available on youth and youth ministry, but far fewer available for youth leaders on how to be best equipped to reach youth. By next spring we hope to complete this curriculum and cover topics regarding what a youth leader should know about context, leadership, and content. While including materials for believers, we hope that the content provided will be beneficial to youth leaders, regardless of religious background or affiliation. Materials for youth leaders are often written by people in North America or Europe, and they lack the context of conflict that we face here. We hope to include a section on youth culture for Israeli, Palestinian and Israeli-Palestinian (Israeli-Arab) youth and discuss issues of conflict, gender, and youth development.

Over the summer Emily Keach from Westmont College wrote a paper for us on youth culture in Israel and Palestine as it relates to the conflict. We would like to share some of her findings with you, as they provide the basis for part of the context section of the curriculum.

Israeli, Palestinian and Israeli-Palestinian youth are three distinct groups that are influenced by different narratives. Israelis and Israeli-Palestinians share a nationality, and Palestinians and Israeli-Palestinians share an ethnicity. While there is a measure of overlap, these three groups are influenced by divergent political and cultural factors, and as a result they have different youth cultures. A master narrative relates how society and individuals link culture and history with identity. As a result of having different master narratives, Israelis,

Palestinians and Israeli-Palestinians question their relationship with the other ethnic groups.

Psychologist Phillip Hammack suggests that Israeli youth have a master narrative with four major themes: persecution and victimization of Jews; existential insecurity; superiority of Jewish morality, economy and military; and delegitimization of Palestinian identity. Israeli youth respond to conflict with strength, countering the perceived weakness of Jews throughout the world in previous centuries. The first two of the four themes legitimize the need for a Jewish state and military. Jewish superiority and delegitimization of Palestinian identity are often intertwined ideas, and this is seen in the desire of Israelis to impose conditions on recognizing Palestinian identity and in Israelis' difficulty in acknowledging existing imbalances of power.

Similar to the Israeli narrative, the Palestinian master narratives have four major themes: loss and dispossession; resistance; existential insecurity; and delegitimization of Israeli identity. During the late 19th and early 20th centuries of Ottoman rule, the British Mandate, the War of 1948 and the years following the establishment of Israel, Palestinian national aspirations were lost, and their cultural identity diluted. In order to counter their feelings of helplessness, an indigenous resistance movement emerged renewing the hope of the Palestinian people. Palestinian existential insecurity is due to the checkpoints, travel restrictions and discrimination they face regularly. Zionism is seen as a Western settler-colonialist movement, therefore ideologically and historically illegitimate.

*(Continued on back)*

