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ATOP Meaningfulworld Humanitarian Healing and Peace Building Mission in Palestine and Israel May 2013

Blanka Angyal

Day 1

Our team arrived in Tel Aviv and met with our collaborators. The weather was very hot, the climate was warm and welcoming, and the political situation was hot with Syria and Israel exchanging bombs and mortar. The plans were reviewed as the team traveled through the windy roads of Ramallah, Palestine. We had our first meeting with Hurryyat as well as with representatives of 33 other human rights and civil rights organizations addressing the multiple needs of prisoners. Together, we will address the emotional needs of the prisoners, detainees as well as their families and children.

Some of the key issues emerging from our meeting were the unfair arrest and mistreatment of Palestinian citizens, including children from 12-18 years of age, as well as the lack of psychologist/mental health professionals in Palestine. The Israeli government is able to arrest someone without a good reason and hold them without due justice for six months, and repeatedly renew the six month term. This leaves families in distress, feeling fear, uncertainty, anger and frustration. Over 5,000 Palestinians are in this category. Another 270 youth are incarcerated without due process, with imprisoned youth between ages of 12-16 receiving no education.

Recommendation: We planned to return to conduct emotional healing workshops with the families and children, including youth who are released from prisons, and the social workers serving this population. Our programs are sensitive to the religious, social, political, and financial issues at hand.



Day 2

On our second day, we conducted a workshop with over 120 students and professors at the Arab American University of Janine, in Occupied Palestine. The campus was beautiful, full of trees, smiling and beautiful students running from one building to the other, and professors eager to greet us in the parking lot! We were greeted warmly and the students and faculty were open, expressive, and engaged during the workshop. Although the university has six departments, they do not have a psychology department, and related that only two universities have psychology departments in Palestine. There is an extreme need for mental health professionals and educational programs to prepare them.

During the workshop, insightful and thought-provoking questions and comments were part of the discussion. The students commented on the following: freedom of expression for women, their visions of what peace looks like, and ways they can feel at peace in these harsh situations. A female student shared that

she is often rejected and discarded as a Westerner due to not covering her hair or when she voices her thoughts.

Despite the state of affairs in Palestine, we observed amazing resilience, hope and dedication in students who are committed to working towards peace and healing not only themselves but their community too. Especially appreciated was the energy balancing yoga movements due to tremendous stress faced daily as a result of the occupation and checkpoints. Dr. Wael Abu Saif said: "The impact on us was tremendous. All those I have met who attended the workshop are happy to have you and asking for future similar programs. Your program uplifted our wounded spirits.

Our future health professionals need to learn about the mind-body-spirit chain, and we acknowledge that you are the spring for them."

We met with the dean and faculty to plan future collaborative programs. It was decided that our team would return and conduct intensive training programs focusing on the mind-body-eco-spirit continuum, with the goal to create peace within as well as in the community at large!

Day 3

The third day started with a workshop at the University of Ben Gurion in Be'er Sheva, Israel. The university was beautiful, with flowering trees and expansive buildings. We presented to a group of conflict resolution master students taught by Dr. Shoshana Steinberg. The students were enthusiastic and generously shared their experiences of trauma and coping. The Israeli side is also affected by the conflict, as one of the female students recalled running with her 1.5 year old child in her arms during a bombing, while another reported chronic fear of an explosion or bombing. After the workshop, students commented that they wished there were more programs and experiential healing programs such as ours, as they have tremendous need. We then met with Dr. Al-Krenawi, chair of the school of social work, to talk about collaborative efforts.

Later in the day, we traveled back to Ramallah, Palestine to meet with Majida al-Masri, the minister of social affairs in the thirteenth Palestinian government, who is also a member of the General Union of Palestinian Women. We were informed that there are three shelters for women who are victims of domestic abuse and two other shelters, for male and female juveniles in Bethlehem. We plan to work with the women and youth in these shelters, as well as with the men to ensure that the women are returning to a safe environment. In order to have a consistent presence in Palestine, we have collaborated with some colleagues to start Meaningfulworld Ramallah.

Finally, Dr. Kalayjian was interviewed by the WAFA Palestinian News Agency about our work in the Middle East as well as her motivation and goals when founding ATOP Meaningfulworld. She shared her personal journey of the Armenian genocide and her journey towards forgiveness. Through the organization, she hopes to share the wisdom she gained and help others heal emotionally, spiritually and physically.

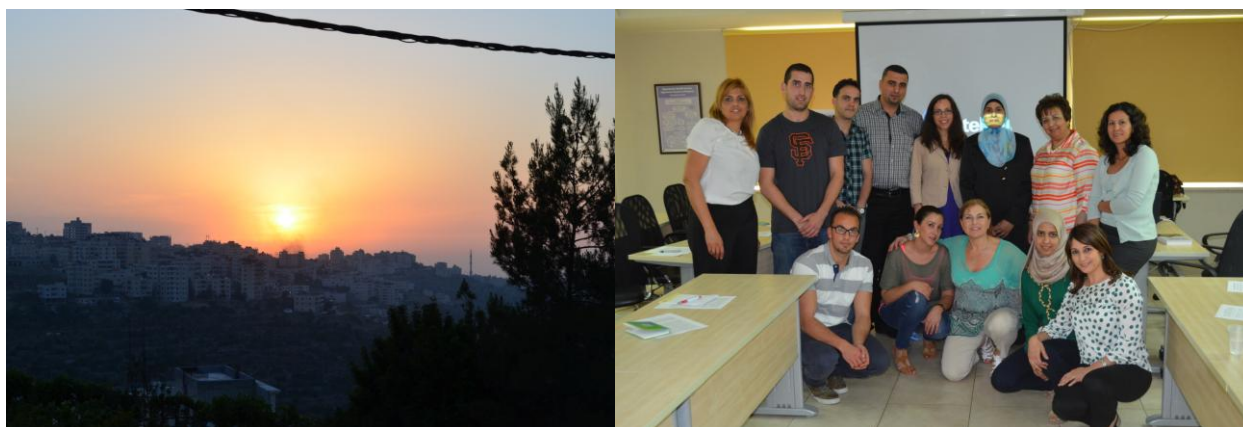


Day 4

The fourth day in Palestine was a very busy one. We first met Abdullah Abu Shawesh, the first secretary and head of the Public Diplomacy Department, and Rania Ibrahim Itbail, the first secretary in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It was truly humbling and inspiring to hear about their dedication and drive to work towards peace in a nonviolent manner, with considerations and hope to protect the population and work towards healing. The following were identified as challenges for peace: the occupation, the world standing by watching without action, continued settlements, and trauma suffered by Palestinian prisoners, their families and children. The ministry also requested to part take in emotional healing training with the leadership as well as the social workers assisting the community.

Next, Dr. Kalayjian had an interview on Palestinian TV. During the interview, she shared her observations and confidence that, with hard work, Palestinians can work to free themselves of their justified anger and hurt and use these energies towards raising awareness internationally about their struggles.

Finally, we concluded the day with a workshop at Juzoor for Health & Social Development, a nonprofit organization. We were welcomed with an air-conditioned room and a tray of fresh fruits. The audience consisted of staff working towards public health, the prevention of diseases, and raising awareness. When talking about trauma, they recognized the need for healing in the Palestinian community, and shared the multiple ways they cope with the everyday trauma of occupation such as exercising, walking, singing, helping others, and smoking hookah (argila). Once again, plans were made for future collaboration towards promotion of emotional health.



Founded in 1990, the Association for Trauma Outreach & Prevention (ATOP) partners of Meaningfulworld.com has achieved international recognition as a leader in training humanitarian outreach professionals as well as responding to two decades of global and local disasters. ATOP is committed to global education promoting state-of-the-art scientific theory, peace and consciousness research, and the development of technical skills to train mental health professionals, teachers, psychologists, art therapists, nutritionists, alternative medicine practitioners, clergy, nurses, mediators, interfaith ministers, and lay persons committed to service. Meaningfulworld Humanitarian Outreach teams make a daily difference in people's lives helping to transform tragedy and trauma into healing through post trauma growth, guidance and meaning-making through a new world view. We have served in over 40 countries, presented over 200 papers, published over 150 articles, 4 books, and 5 films. Ask yourself ...Ask your friends...What makes your world more meaningful? Be a change agent, come get involved, or send your tax-deductible donation online: www.Meaningfulworld.com