

The Practice of Peace in Practice:

The Israeli Palestinian Example

Qualitative Research on the Israeli Palestinian
Open Space Gathering in Rome
6-9 June 2002

Conducted by: Carol Daniel Kasbari, Avner Haramati and Tova Averbuch

November 2003

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The arrangements for the Open Space in Rome

A lot of energy went to the issue of recruitment, mainly of the Palestinian side. The first Palestinian point of contact was a political figure, and wasn't so accepted by some Palestinians, so the sponsor was looking for another contact and a lot of havoc was created. Finally through tiring negotiations and mediation two points of contact were created. In the Israeli side through connections and the will of the sponsors together to bring people from the right wing, a good variety from the Israeli society was gathered. The criteria for selecting people on the Israeli side were people of influence from the largest political spectrum of the society, and not necessarily experienced in dialogue with Palestinians.

On the Palestinian side there were three different figures that have helped in choosing the participants. The criteria of the Palestinians were: People from the large spectrum of professions that are independent, experienced and eloquent speakers, willing to take part in joint gathering with Israelis and familiar with the `materials`.

The steering committees worked on each side separately. However, the sponsors and the supporting team have worked with both sides. Although there were some complains about the dominant role that the sponsors have taken.

As the Open Space took place in Rome, it was very costly. One of the sponsors who was familiar with OST, understood that in order to reach the full potential of Open Space, there should be a big diversity of people, and luckily he could fund large group of people.

The involvement of the Italians, the Italian Ambassador and the energetic sponsor in Rome, Centro Dyonisa, was very important to make this event happen. They gave part of the money, and the ambassador gave an international and respectable umbrella, and impartial hospitality.

The persistence and care of one of the sponsors, Daniel Kropf, who put a lot of energy, time, money and connections, make this conference happen.

The Theme of the OS Gathering:

The Day after: Issues and opportunities for building trust

Time & Place: Rome, villa Piccolomini, Centro Dionysia Per La Arti e Le Culture
6-9 June 2002

Sponsors:

Ms. Nicolleta Gaida, Centro Dionysia, Per La Arti e Le Culture
Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Italian ambassador
Mr. Daniel Kropf, Education for Life

Open Space Facilitator: Mr. Harrison Owen

Assistants: Ms. Samar Daoud, Mr. Avner Haramati,

No. Of Palestinian Participants: 18

No. Of Israeli Participants: 18

Research theme:

The contribution of an OST gathering in promoting the process of practicing peace.

The Palestinian Team:

There were 6 Palestinians interviewed; each interview took from two to three hours. Carol conducted the interviews with the Palestinian participants, living in the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

Questions asked for Palestinians Participants:

How do you recall the meeting/encounter in Rome? How would you describe it?

What sort of feelings does it bring to you? Do you still have these feelings?

Did this meeting change any of your perception on the other, from your group, from the other group?

In what way do you think the OS served this meeting?

Tangible results that came out of this meeting, personal and other?

What plans/projects ate you involved in as a result of this meeting, or wish to be involved in?

What should be done more in order to promote joint actions between both sides?

Are you in contact with anyone from the Rome group, Palestinians/ Israelis? If yes or no, why?

Would you suggest to your friend to go through this experience, would you do it again today?

The Palestinians interviews: (Conducted and written by Carol Daniel Kasbari)

1. Recalling the Meeting:

Sense of Mission:

This meeting was an overwhelming experience at every possible level. While eating, drinking, or discussing issues, we felt we had a strong sense of mission. We wanted to break taboos. We have passed all the rituals of name-calling and finger pointing. We had many monologues that hardly lead to dialogue, but no one walked out. There was a true spirit of being amiable.

Positive, New, and Interesting:

This was a very positive experience, new and interesting. It was tense sometimes, but there was a challenge to stay in control and not to lose your temper when something antagonizing happens. Particularly beneficial was that participants included the Israeli right wing, and not the usual leftist.

Inspiring and empowering:

An inspiring, empowering, and exciting experience that I wish I could have more often. This was such a pleasant experience that makes me feel good every time I remember it. Can't remember having any negative energy in me, there was a time when I felt that I wanted to kill someone because of what he had to say, I was smiling instead.

Discovering Humanity:

A very unique experience where we witnessed how people from the two sides of the conflict have connected in a fantastic way and discovered their humanity. What made the meeting successful is that the human dimension, and not the system or state, was in the center of it. It was especially meaningful because it brought out the right issues for people and allowed them to share their real concerns. We were not kind to each other. This meeting was a sweet moment in the middle of anger.

More than the meeting or the activities, I think back about the meeting and feel certain nostalgia to the people and the atmosphere at the meeting.

Genuine and different:

This was the best encounter I have ever experienced for conflict resolution with Israelis. People's reactions to issues were genuine, better understanding, and had an overall different scope.

People Creating Success:

Although I have met with a lot of Israelis, I had no expectations about the Rome meeting. This was mainly because I did not know who the meeting participants would be. I strongly believe that the success of any meeting depends on the participants, not the

agenda or the activities. The participants made this meeting a success.

2. Feelings, Perceptions and Desires Felt during the Meeting and at Time of Interview:

Storytelling Humanizes People:

Loved the meeting because it brought about a feeling of emancipation: dreams, healing and vision drives. It gave hope to people by listening to their stories and narratives. Storytelling, as a basic element of survival, humanizes people.

Because the human being, and not the system, was in the core of the meeting, my perceptions tuned up, refined, and refocused regarding the conflict and the Israelis. However, at the end of the day, each Israeli and Palestinian individual is different. That is why, neither my Israeli friend, nor me, could generalize our experience to the other people. Each individual thought that he/she is different from his or her own people and we are not representing our people accurately. For this reason, more people should be involved in such meetings.

During the meeting, I got to know Israelis personally. This was better than reading about them or learning about them from their news. I learned about them from their personality. We became individuals, humans. My ideas about them are more focused and polished than before.

I still believe that together we can make a change in the situation. The more meetings we have, the better position we are in as Palestinians. During the OS meeting in Rome, we called each other by name, and not by group (Palestinian and Israeli).

Seeing Things Differently-Witnessing Real and Deep Fear:

The meeting felt artificial and far from reality, but it gave me an alternative way to look at things related to our life, conflict, and people. It forced me to put myself in their shoes and see things in a way that I never saw before, even when I lived with them daily. It has opened my eyes on different political point of views. Most importantly, I never witnessed so much real and deep fear from Palestinians as I witnessed during this meeting. I believe that this is real fear and that Israelis are in a paranoid state of mind. Their fears are so rooted that it is hard for them to get out of this position. They honestly believe that it's the only way to keep them safe. This is not true. Palestinians, like myself, will be willing to accommodate these fears that are related to security issues. I feel that Israelis are scared to get to know us well, because then it will break their pattern of thinking. It will be difficult for them to move from their ordinary position, fear of the other.

Blinded by the Myth of Security:

My feelings were positive during the meeting, but these feelings were short lived. Today, I feel that it wasn't real, as if we were acting, and that it was not real life. The problem with Israelis is their belief of the myth of security. In this disguise they have stopped seeing reality. Some of them prefer to be blind than to face the horrible truth that they

are justifying everything under the name of security.

Breaking Taboos-Or Not:

There was a certain break of taboos. All participants agreed to end the occupation and complete withdrawal to 1967 borders. Even the right wing Shas and Likoud agreed to this, but we couldn't pass this agreement, or "have it as contagious virus" outside of our group. Inside the OS experience, the Israelis showed some change in their positions and they understood that they have to change their attitude towards the Palestinians. But, I believe they returned to their initial beliefs and fears once they went back to be part of the system.

Working with the Israeli Right Wing:

Participation of Israeli right wing was a positive thing. It gave me a sense of hope that they also would like to change things. At least they have started to think and talk about changing the situation. They presented a feeling of good spirit, especially for those meeting Palestinians for the first time. We as Palestinians have a duty to convince the Israelis that they have a partner and that we can solve our problems together, but in order for this to happen, they have to put their fears aside.

In spite of all of our problems and differences, I felt that we have a possibility to reach an understanding. We can communicate very well as human beings in a neutral place, even with right wing Israelis. For me, the right wing Israelis are a good choice to work with because they are the ones who should hear the Palestinian point of view, from Palestinians, on a personal level. I believe that some of them had a real change in their perception about us. I hope that they are able to influence the decision-makers.

I have met with many Israelis; however, most of them were from labor or the left. The Rome meeting provided me with the opportunity to meet with members of the right wing, which further expanded my knowledge of Israeli society.

I realized that we could reach some channels of communication, even with the right wing Israelis. In the end, they are real people.

Resolving the Right of Return:

We as Palestinians have to work together to resolve the issue of the right of return of refugees. We have to insist on getting Israel to admit fault and responsibility for this tragedy. However, in order to resolve this conflict, we also should accommodate ourselves to the Israeli peoples' fears. This idea was reinforced in Rome. I still have this idea in my mind and believe that it is the right place to start. We, Palestinians, have to be realistic as to what we can get back from Israel. The keyword for both sides to remember is "compromise".

Taking Off Our Skin:

One of the most serious challenges for me was to reach out to Israelis. I realized that when I present better narratives and change my demands from them, instead of using UN resolution 242 and all other rules, I should use something more realistic to our current

situation, and then there is a possibility to change their minds and attitudes.

I also realized that if I invest more in myself, structure my priorities as a Palestinian citizen, communicate better with others about my hopes, inspirations, and fears, and open up, without lying, about my feelings, I'll gain people's trust. This is what I did in Rome. I was taking off my skin and saw others do the same. This means that there was an implicit common trust between us. This is something that I didn't think was possible before the meeting.

Questioning Qualifications:

I believe that not all the participants in the Rome meeting were fit to deal with the issues and questions at hand during the meeting.

3. Conflict between Reality and the Meeting:

Distrust, Fear, and Paranoia at the Root of the Conflict:

Our conflict is based on distrust, fear, and paranoia. On a personal level, I understand their fears. Unfortunately, I have discovered that Israelis are convinced by their paranoia and that they don't want to give it up.

Cause and effect is at the root of the conflict. The nature of the Israelis is that they don't have trust in anyone. After the meeting, many of them expressed to me that trust would be on a personal level between us, but not on the collective level. Any case, Trust is a very naive word in our reality.

Humiliation In the Name of State and Security:

Everything is about the system (state, army, security), it comes first. Everything is built in the name of security and the good of the state. The main problem with Israelis is that all of them are in the service of their army and place the individual at the end. For example, when we arrived at the airport, all of our good feelings that we had in Rome were put on the shelf, as if there was no connection with what happened in Rome. Again, the system proved to be more important than the human being. The purpose of the system should be to serve the human being and not to be worshiped. It appears that the situation with Israelis is reversed. I am always ready to be checked and investigated, but I ask them to do it in a humane way. I'm not of piece of something! The secret of the success of the Rome meeting was that the human being, and not the system, was in the core of the meeting. That's why it worked!

We aren't mistresses of our fate, but they are! They are in control. For example, at the airport the Palestinians were treated differently than all others. None of our Israeli counterparts could interfere, and we understood this. However, this creates a vicious circle: we meet with them, we make all the efforts to change their minds, and we go through hell, all in order to solve our problems with a hope that all of this will make an effect and change the situation somehow. But sadly, this circle is closed, and that's why we need a third party.

Still Under Their Mercy-Still Occupied:

As a Palestinian, I can't overcome the fact that when I returned to the country, I am again under their occupation. At the end of the day, no matter how great our meeting was, I have to beg them in order to get me a permit to visit Jerusalem. I am under their mercy. That is why I never ask them for anything. I don't need favors.

We can work together on specific issues, such as trauma and education in order to improve our situation, but at the end of the day, we have nothing. We have no democracy, no lands, and no control over anything. That is why Israelis need to act more than us. Both have a responsibility to influence the public and take steps to change, but we are not equal in power or in resources.

Israelis, who we meet on a daily basis, are the army. They are everywhere in the West Bank. They are the soldiers and the occupiers. In reality, the Israelis are our enemy. In Rome, I didn't feel that. I felt as if we were equal. But in reality, we aren't. That's why my feelings at the meeting were not realistic; they didn't represent my daily life. There is a detachment, a dilemma between our reality and our desires. For example when I work with them on a joint activity, they look at me as equal intellectually but when it comes to rules and regulations, I'm under their mercy. They will be my oppressors. The bottom line is that we don't have the same rights that they have as human beings. Daily, I think about my daughter who was shot in her leg as a child. She is still partially paralyzed. She and her brothers live abroad, away from here. All of this because of the occupation.

We had very high emotions during the Rome meeting, but when we came back here, reality struck again. The Israeli invasion of our cities was in July, just two weeks after the Rome meeting. The invasion lasted for a long time and killed a lot of the good spirit of people.

Far From Reality:

In Rome I felt little artificial and away from reality. It gave me another angle/way to look at our conflict and us. It was less loaded and very positive. We were expressing our real feelings, but again, it's not the reality where we live. As soon as we landed at the airport, we felt the difference!

4. OST in the service of the meeting and of my life:**OS Principles as a Way of Life:**

Os is as choreography, connected with spirit. It is an extraordinary way of putting the human being at the core of the enterprise. I loved the OS principles; they make a beautiful picture together. One of biggest decision of my life was early retirement from my work, where I spent most of my life. This was a result of my OS experience in Rome. Since then, I am using these principles in my life and found great relief.

Success of this meeting is credit to the OST. It was a success in every parameter despite of these facts: zero preparations, people were chosen randomly, and environment, etc. I believe that Harrison, the facilitator, was a master. His performance is beyond description. I am not sure if the meeting would be as effective if another person facilitated it instead of him. I am an OS believer. I have converted.

OS technique is a good learning process. The tool is simple, but can deal with very complicated issues.

OST Brings out the Good in People:

OS respects the self and the human. It brings out the good in people and the good feelings have lasted until today. Although we have difficulties to maintain these good feelings, we know they exist. OS worked fantastically when we were dealing with the most upsetting and complicated issues like security. It created positive energy in the room, although the discussions were hard. OS really worked despite the ongoing blood circle. All of the participants, I feel, have a personal affinity towards each other. I can't see how it will solve the conflict. Maybe it doesn't work in this sense. But, it will bring the respect to each other and reduce the fear and the distrust that the conflict brings.

Open, Honest, and Effective Communication:

OST enabled people to talk without inhibitions. We were mostly spontaneous. It created a situation where we could not hold back things. At the same time, no one was impolite or hurtful in any way. My expectation of tension, before I reached Rome, was very high. But my expectation wasn't met. OST gave us a feeling of relaxation. It is a simple tool, but it gives high confidence to people. Most amazing was how it makes us flow.

When I was first told about OST, before Rome, it felt ridiculous to me. I asked myself what am I going to do there. During the meeting, I discovered how wonderful it is. It is a strong tool that allows people to make their own choices. People are able to decide where to go and what to listen to, and they can talk about whatever issue they want. This is the best way to get people involved in anything.

All of the meetings that I participated in before Rome were a waste of my time. They were not interesting and not productive. At such meetings, people tend to have lots of information, but they don't know how to pass this information to others. Here is the secret of OS: it creates the best communication between people, especially in small groups. Such groups allow us to focus on specifics and move away from the general level. Large groups are not as effective as small groups. OST requires one thing in order to work, and that is real willingness from people to join.

OST is very creative in diagnosing problems and creating an environment that encourages debating and arguing in a well-behaved manner. It is a good tool to that allows participants to reach a common understanding and reach deep interpretations. It is a powerful tool. Thanks to this great technique, the nature of the meeting was very

transparent and keen. OS allowed us to show everything without tricks. It showed the real nature of people and provided an enabling platform/system for communicating with groups. I felt that even with the Israeli right wing, I could have channels of communication. Although this was at times difficult, there was no abortion and no one walked out, neither physically nor psychologically.

OST served our meeting perfectly. We talked about what we wished in an open physical space, in an open and spontaneous way, and in small groups. No one organized our groups for us. Each individual found his own way to his own group. This freedom created a positive start to the meeting that continued throughout the meeting. Thanks to the OS technique, everyone was involved.

People were given the freedom to say what they want, to set their own agendas, and decide what kind of discussion to have, whether positive or negative. So, in the end, the participants determined the success or failure of the meeting. Participants chose to make the meeting a success.

Although the meetings were highly productive and interesting, we only scratched the surface of the issue. We did not get deep enough into our problems.

5. Results of the Meeting and Follow Up:

Breaking Taboos:

The main result of this meeting was that we, both sides, could break taboos. I hoped that we could pass this virus outside too, but reality is very harsh. In the end, we had to go back to the separation walls!

Lack of Momentum and Follow Up:

An important element of the meeting is the lack of momentum. We had a very high level of inspiration during the meeting, but we missed the timing. There should have been some level of follow up within my own group and with the other side. It is like a kitchen; everyone should coordinate and work together. There should have been a whip person, a reliable coordinator that we can trust and that can work with both sides to gather us together. We needed someone to press the button and push. Personally, I can't initiate any gathering on my own because I don't want to be under criticism or to be a martyr. I want to survive.

I was disappointed that almost none of the Israelis showed up for the gathering that was scheduled in Yad Hashmona (a social gathering with Harrison Owen, six months after Rome) . This was a negative sign for me.

There was not enough follow up to the Rome meeting. Neither side took enough initiative to meet again. Many of the Palestinian participants wanted to attend a meeting that was scheduled in Yad Hashmona, however, they were unable to obtain travel permits from Israel.

We are so apart mentally, psychologically, and geographically. In order to have some kind of follow up, we needed a neutral person/body that could coordinate and gather us from time to time. The more meetings we could have locally, and not abroad, the more it could mushroom.

There were so many good ideas for joint activities or projects that seemed so practical and simple in Rome. However, when we arrived here we discovered that we are in conflict of amenability. What can work in the Israelis society doesn't necessary work in the Palestinian one. There wasn't a deep understanding to the Palestinian needs. I believe this is because we couldn't meet as often as requested in order to get to this depth. The environment is not supportive at all; it is hostile and shaky. So many ideas were aborted in the end.

Unfortunately, there hasn't been enough follow up for the Rome group, but this is understandable. The miserable life that people live here takes away all the positive energy that they may have. The externality of environment is very cruel.

It is very hard to keep relationships or contacts with Israelis because we do not have a nurturing environment that is needed for organizing any event.

Creating Friendships and Losing Contact:

There was liberation of friendships. Everyone connected with at least one person. For example, I care to know what is happening with X Israeli who I have been in contact with for a while. And he cares too. Actually, he calls me much more than I call him. I hope I can awaken my relationships with them again.

After the meeting, the human contact didn't take place enough. The situation makes that impossible. We can't get to them and they can't get to us. After Rome, we contacted each other through email, but the word is so rigid on the net and often loses its meaning. The lack of immediate contact, face-to-face contact, creates a distant feeling.

Since Rome, I have had some personal contacts with Israelis. Some of these contacts are frozen, and some have progressed since then. I am more aware and open to their personal fears and have learned more about their history. I have an Israeli friend from the Rome group who I have remained in contact with. We tried to work together, but it didn't work.

Involvement with Other Organizations/Peace Groups:

One of the results of Rome was the establishment of Education for Life in Palestine. I am an international board member of this organization and believe that it was a great idea to establish a branch in Palestine. Since returning from the Rome meeting, I have become more involved in peace meetings with Israelis, mainly with the Israeli Palestinian action group for Peace. This movement was founded last year by a heterogeneous group of Palestinians and Israelis, who mostly meet in the West Bank.

Since Rome, I am more open to Israelis when I meet them. As a result of OS Rome, I have established Education for Life in Palestine. This is a very positive step towards joint work with Israelis. We share material, ideas, and expertise, but when it comes down to the ground, the Palestinian branch decides what is good for it. We do not have any joint activities or joint groups, but we do have a mixed Steering Committee.

Today, I'm working with a Jewish figure on establishing an international/universal organization for promoting better education.

In my opinion, there is no need for me to work on establishing organizations between Palestinians and Israelis. I strongly believe that personal relationships should be developed before engaging in business with Israelis.

Real Life Change:

After Rome, I better understand how to work with Israelis and have learned how to better deal with them regarding business. I have become less emotional and more logical and understanding in my arguments, even with the extreme right. The meeting really affected my business and encouraged me to get involved with other Israelis who weren't in the meeting. I have become involved a new community that was so apart from us.

The Israeli interviews

(Interviews were conducted and written by Avner Haramati and Tova Averbuch)
Some of the interviews were conducted by phone; others were conducted personally.

What do you remember?

The strong and sincere session on `Feelings`. (Most of the Israelis mentioned this session, that had been suggested by an Israeli on the 2nd day, after a terrorist attack the night before in Israel).

The inability of the Palestinians to return to Ramallah.

The wedding – being one group celebrating and the feeling of becoming apart when at the ceremony the Rabbi (who was a participant) said the old Jewish prayer “ If I forget Jerusalem let my right hand be forgotten”

The good atmosphere, not tense

In the big circle the Palestinians spoke in cliches .

The musical band and dancing in the last evening, it was like the peace vision of the of the prophets.

Dancing together at the end was an elevating experience, like a farewell meditation.

No reaction of the Palestinians when X announced on the terrorist attack, “So everything is just talking”.

The 2nd day was very emotionally loaded; everyone talked his or her hearts out.

Good personal connections and fraternity with the other side, that was not expected.

The evening we went out together in Rome. In Israel we are afraid to go to their places and here we spent time together.

The open arena of the OS in the Villa, it was really open.

Closeness and connection to Palestinians and to Israelis I didn't know, and friendship with people which have different and opposing political opinions.

Interesting social encounter, new people, new perspectives, it raised curiosity and was pleasant, not stressful.

When I arrived I was much stressed, entering a tough contest, but I was surprised how

pleasant it was on the personal level.

The personification of the other, when one talks on the big problem it is different when he knows some people there.

They have a difficulty to condemn terrorism; One Palestinian told me that his daughter is in the Hamas. If that is so there is something sick in this society. Another explained without embarrassment why he was part of the National Front.

Strong visual memory of the circle of people in the open garden.

The strongest experience was of getting acquainted for the first time, high expectations and fantasies, adrenaline and excitement.

What did you feel?

A lot of optimism.

It was a very exciting meeting.

Closer to the Palestinians more than to any other nation (Americans)

Becoming so close to them gave the impression that they do not represent the Palestinian leadership that support the terror and encourages anti Israeli propaganda.

That they really want to achieve peace

A lot of involvement.

I'll never forget this experience, it was excellent.

Shocked when in a discussion the Palestinians are apathetic to the killings in the terror attack. I didn't understand why are we sitting with them at all, and that they don't understand that security is so important to us. Then the issues were opened: that they are fed up to condemn the terror attacks all the time, and they suffer also, and for the first time we spoke on the real and painful issues. (It was in the session on Feelings)

I was frustrated when I arrived. I thought to myself: we signed on peace agreement 7 years ago and they didn't respect the peace agreement. I left Rome with hope that we can give and take for peace and security. Now I am frustrated that 900 of our people died without a reason.

There is hope if we continue the encounters between the 2 people, and see that things can be done.

The frustration is because our ways in the war are different and we have fewer murderers. I asked them: “We make very costly efforts to kill only terrorists and not civilians, although our economic is in crisis. How do you understand that?” “How comes that we are changing so many Prime Ministers in order to find ways but you never change” They didn’t have answers.

It was a total surprise for me, we all felt like a gang of 18 years old children that ran out of school.

Heavy emotional things happened between the people.

Falling in love, flaming hope and, eventually, frustration. Growing disbelief that there is any possibility for getting along with one another. Difficulty in waiting, waiting for too long too many times can put me in despair.

Regret and sorrow that this cannot be our daily life reality, that this opportunity is so near yet so far, that we do not succeed in waking up and influencing our leadership to make it our reality.

3. What did you learn? What did you gain?

I found that the way the Israelis and the Palestinians see what happened in Oslo and Camp David agreements is entirely different. In Camp David Israelis thought they gave everything and the Palestinians thought they had an inarticulate leader that could not explain why it is not `everything` and not acceptable. In the Oslo agreement it was clear to the Palestinians that it will end in 67 borders and the Israelis were sure that it would end in a compromise. The 2 sides were certain that the other broke his promises. I learned that the Palestinian crisis point was already when Rabin was assassinated, “the man who really wanted peace”, and then Bibi Netaniahu from the Likud (right wing party) came and they lost hope and a deep despair began. I was surprised from the big gap in the perception of why this Intifada had begun.

The Palestinians and we are in a loop; we care mostly about our security, they don’t really care because they mostly care about their freedom. The Palestinians say “give us freedom and we will give you security” and we say the opposite. We ask, “what would you do if you find out that a group of suicide bombers are on their way?” they answer “if you leave us alone it wouldn’t have happened”

Especially after the 2nd day I learned that the story is much more complex, when you are on one side the picture seems simple.

I found that my stand was shaken and I realize now that by using force and military actions we won’t bring the Palestinians to give up and say “yes”.

There are very big gaps in each of the groups.

With this Palestinian group we could have made peace but they are not a representative group, and they were selected rigorously. The Israeli group was much more representative of society and was selected randomly.

We tried to understand and find solutions and they tried to convince and influence.

I found that they are not enemies but human beings.

As human beings we feel that we are all in the same boat until we find out the line that sets us apart: When the issue of refugees was brought up, the Palestinians were very careful. On the political level it was unsolved.

More understanding of the level of personal suffering under the occupation. Beyond the ideologies, their life is in the gutter, and these are people like you and me and from the same economical strata.

These people don't represent the entire Palestinian society. They are very focused towards ideological goals and they are almost invalid in the way they relate to us. They have a great difficulty to give up and compromise on something concrete, and not self-evident. (Like giving up the Jordan River or the Green line borders). With us, the idea of giving up and compromising is part of peace making. With them it is all or nothing.

On my personal level I am more willing to cope with their hardship. Not guilt but responsibility that any solution will take that into accounts. Without this nothing will happen.

On the political level, until Rome I have seen only my/our needs, today I see the necessity to cope with the solutions of their needs.

Before Rome I wouldn't accept a Palestinian state, I used to think: "Why, who died that we have to give them a state" (A use of an Israeli expression)

At the end I understood that we do not basically agree about what are each side's rights on this land and that's why this entire project dooms to fail. One Israeli claimed: "If I agree that you have rights on the land do you agree that I have? So can't we have rights on your side of the 67 borders when I agree on your rights within the State of Israel"?

I learned that the Palestinians, like new immigrants, are oversensitive because of their suffering and see conspiracy in everything.

One of the compelling experiences for me was in a small group. I took the reins at one point. It was important for me that the discussion wouldn't proceed to the roots of the conflict but to possible solutions. In 20 minutes we succeeded to come closer and could almost sign an agreement. But one of the Palestinians told me later: "you are dangerous, how comes that you succeed in bringing us to find solutions"

We can reach agreements with academics and businessmen, they don't have a political commitment and cannot loose. It is not like sitting with the extremes.

About the Israelis, I've seen that they are making a pathetic endeavor to be liked by the Palestinians and moderate themselves in order not to be perceived as monsters or cannibals.

The Israelis are more shallows and less sophisticated and do not know the history of the conflict. The Palestinians have more grace and they have done well their homework. I've seen it again that we as a people do not know the Arabs and how to negotiate with them.

The Israeli side is talking about security and they speak about the daily suffering in checkpoints and about "Stop hurting us and give us freedom"

The situation is much more complex than I thought.

I have seen pain and suffering that crosses all sectors of the Palestinian society and as a human being it pushes me to do things beyond this conference.

It is important to continue in order that the Palestinians won't meet only Israelis from the left, the army and Israeli Arabs Member of Parliament, and hardly people from the right wing.

Education for Life benefited professionally from the meeting as new relationships led to the setting up of Education for Life's Ramallah office and both Palestinian and Israeli participants sitting on its international board.

From the technologies of OS and Non Violent Communication I learned and implemented in my daily work in the company and with the clients.

New relationships both on professional and personal level. Work in promoting important issues as NVC, trauma healing etc.

A very close, very intimate friend.

I learned that we have to move from sympathy, that is based on my worldview, my ego, to empathy, that is released from my ego, an understanding that demands stepping out of myself and entering the existential experience of the other, for the Palestinians. To experience their experience.

I understand that if we want to make peace we need to build trust and in trust building two things are crucially important: empathy and introspection. Empathy so we could understand the other in his own way and introspection so we could take responsibility for past mistakes and wrong perceptions.

The OST surprised me personally and helped me grow since I realized the connection between working in a way that has no predetermined structures and outcomes and the possibility of empathy creation. I came to Rome much more structured and I gained a very important perspective of getting acquainted, of having an experience of meaningful contact of going through the intifada while my son serving for all that time as a combat soldier in the West Bank.

4. The levels of trust intra and inter the groups/ Change of perceptions

The Palestinians gathering among themselves gave an impression that they have to make sure they are aligned with the stand of their official authorities, and there is someone who controls from above. Everyone among us represented himself freely.

On the personal level, I could trust some of them and some not because I have seen them coordinating among themselves.

In the 1st day they supported the official line entirely but on the 2nd day I could hear privately self-criticism.

In the press conference at the end one of the Palestinians came back to the usual attacks and accusations on Israel – That destroyed the trust.

I liked the metaphor that I heard from a Palestinian” The Jews who came to Palestine after the Holocaust are like people who jump from the top of a building on fire and fall on innocent bypassers (the Palestinians)”.

I don't know how much they actually internalized the learning.

With intelligent and practical people we can reach understanding and agreements. But in Rome we lived in a bubble because many of them were Christian academics and it's easier with them, they feel inferior among the Palestinians, and they feel tired from the situation. It was a surprise for me that we can talk to the Christians.

I can understand better the people (maybe a first step to trust) and that their extreme attitudes are expressions of their hardship and not only their will to exterminate me, and it is not propaganda.

We did more trust building with the Palestinians than any other country in the world. There are more things in common between the Palestinians, in the mentality and in the mutual suffering. We will overcome the conflict as we did in Rome, if we have a time out for ourselves alone.

The togetherness enabled a deep acquaintance with the other, and the enhancement of trust.

The Palestinians didn't represent their entire society, and I presume they were more moderate. Our group was more representative, we had real people from the right, and this is the majority that there is a need to cope with, but we lacked the extreme right.

I came to Rome with the perception that I, as an Israeli, am the bad and he, the Palestinian, is the good; I am the guilty and he is the miserable. I was deeply disappointed to find out that the Palestinians were human beings with fears and weaknesses like everybody. The disappointment was that they were not ready to go along with my romantic offers to find a way.

I came with a lot of resentment to the Israelis and I was surprised about their honesty, their move from a position of tremendous suspiciousness to relating as human beings.

I came full of hope and energy, a burning flame, of which only a pale spark of hope is left. What had put it down was the rational and institutional attitude of the peace engineers. The peace professionals that make their living from bringing peace, they will never bring peace because when they do their job is gone.

The women on both sides had a deep and remarkable impression of the possibility to connect in contrast with the professional peacemakers. Watching the women I came to appreciate the possibility of grass root peace making.

Israelis and Palestinians peace making is like a couple in a process of divorce (not of marriage...): they make the decision, as adults, that they don't want to live together any more yet they have to make up their minds whether to develop a new independent narrative and go each with their own new life or continue to attack and bury one another. Our role now is to take responsibility over the well being of our mutual children.

5. The contribution of OST:

Very good method that enable to be totally free and focused.

We are deciding the on topics to talk about.

Doesn't know any other method that does not enforce on people what to say.

Good equilibrium between navigating and free discussions.

There were not so many interesting discussions, and those, which were interesting, surrounded some dominant figures.

Some of the most interesting conversations were in the breaks.

The fact that everyone can bring up any issue that bothers him makes it more real and

gives a chance to be authentic.

The method doesn't make a difference, The grace and openness of the people matters.

Excellent method, the circle metaphysically creates a closed connection, you are surrounded and cannot escape. It gives an equal status to everyone.

At the 1st circle the 2 nations sat apart, later we were totally mixed.

The free choice, personal stories that 2 sides can identify with, like where to seat in a coffee shop to avoid suicide bombers.

Many good things happened here.

Very important that people didn't come with agendas and speeches.

The equality that was created without hierarchies.

The ability to give everyone to speak out and take responsibility.

The innovation – people were very curious, especially the Palestinians, wanted to learn the method.

The failure - We didn't have the time on the 3rd day to build projects and that's why the projects didn't continue.

It is a luxury to let everyone to go where they would like. There is not enough time and the problems to solve are known. I could destroy the OS if I would have brought up issues of poetry and art in order to get to know each other.

There were 3 days of graciousness, and the space created good atmosphere.

We are deciding the topics to talk about.

Worked very well from the beginning.

We didn't reach agreements but all the social barriers fell down, internal jokes that helped even in the most tensed discussions.

OS enabled people to meet in a very open and flowing way, an ability to physically touch one another, a natural way to do something together. In OS there is an element for surprise and flow.

I was amazed at the immediacy in which issues surfaced and were put on the table. In other methodologies people prepare more and the distance between parties is kept up

until the end, the sponsors make sure to keep the separations.

OST served us tremendously well in that that it is free from predetermined structures and aims/results and in that enables a deep acquaintance and empathy to develop in a short time.

Important factor for success was the interpersonal factor was the people mix. I came to this event because it was an attempt to break out of the closed circle of professional peacemakers that move from one conference to another.

Contrary to the OS spirit I came to Rome with something concrete that I wished to move forward and with hindsight it spoiled my participation since I came with a predetermined limitation and I spoiled things for others by closing the space.

The trap or paradox of OST is that if people do not have agenda nothing will happen and if they have a strong agenda there is a risk of abuse in closing the space.

Even though I had a personal agenda the acquaintance process that took place was very profound.

6. What next?

Create more opportunities to these kinds of meetings, not formally, in order to keep the humanity of the people. The hostility and animosity today is between the nations (to destroy Vs to kill) and not the leaders.

The time is not ripe for mutual projects.

I would bring a paper like the Geneva agreement and let the sides argue about it.

Could be very important to make an OS about `understanding the other` in the mirror of poetry, literature and art.

There is hope if we continue the encounters between the 2 people, and see that things can be done.

Meetings exposed to the Media.

Creating Israeli and Palestinian common newspaper.

We need someone to lead in order to continue and it didn't happened.

What lowered the energy was the attempt to connect EFL (the sponsor's organization) to the entire group. We didn't come for that.

To my disappointment there was no established continuation to the forum. There were few initiatives and I was involved in one of them and heard about the others.

The recommendation is to enlarge and establish the Forum, and to prepare thoroughly, in small groups, the issues from Rome for discussion in the Forum in order to enhance the understanding of each one.

To create a common dictionary for words like: terror, occupation, fears. Everyone have a different understanding.

Someone has to be organizing it, on both sides, either a person or an organization. There is a will, what is needed is organization.

It is important for the Os sponsor not to become patronizing and not to be expecting anything in return.

An OST under every tree, widening the circles

General Findings

By Carol Daniel Kasbari, Avner Haramati and Tova Averbuch

Paradigm Shift

Palestinian participants believe now that the Israelis are living in deep and real fear, and they are not pretending. But they also believe that they are blinded by their rooted fear. Israeli participants learned that the reality is more complex and the justice doesn't sit on one side. For instance they have a better understanding today of the reasons of the breakdown of the Intifada, which they didn't know before the meeting and they blamed only on the Palestinian side. Before Rome Israelis believed that Palestinians started the Intifada, even though they were offered everything during the negotiations, because they don't really want peace with Israel and they have revealed their true face. During the gathering they discovered that it's not so, and both sides have responsibilities of the failure of the negotiations.

Both sides internalized that they are in a vicious circle of: security to Israelis and freedom to Palestinians. Palestinians participants believe that without ending the occupation nothing will happen and Israelis participants believe that without getting their security they can't compromise. Today, each side starts to understand his possible contribution in breaking this vicious circle.

Building trust

While Palestinian perceived the Israeli participants as representatives of their society and they all were satisfied by the participation of the right wing, Israelis think that the Palestinians were representing only a narrow spectrum of the Palestinian society. The Israelis wished to meet wider spectrum than include religious people and other opposition parties, and felt that they couldn't generalize this experience to the all the Palestinians, regarding political state of mind. However, Israelis emphasized the fact that they did represent their society in this sense.

Palestinians felt well while expressing themselves in small groups, more than in the big circle, they thought it was more efficient and human. Israelis felt that in the big groups Palestinian were speaking slogans, while when discussing privately they were more open to self-criticism, and during these coffee breaks the trust was recuperated.

The nature of the gathering using the OST enabled everyone to raise the issues they have passion for, and to choose where to be. This has contributed to the authenticity of the discussions in small groups and enhanced trust between the participants.

All the Palestinians argued about the big gap between their daily reality and the gathering. In their daily life the Palestinians are still occupied and feel under the mercy of Israelis, as in Rome they felt equal to the Israelis in all aspects.

Israelis were exposed, in Rome, to the Palestinian daily suffering and humiliation and to some of the Israelis it was an unbearable feeling, imagining what Palestinians, they have met, have to go through on a daily basis.

Both sides have expressed that in reality both feel fear, distrust and traumatized by the

other. Both were exposed to the process of humanizing the enemy, as they all expressed during and after the gathering, like some expressed that it was good opportunity to put yourself in the other's shoes, and to feel and think like he does.

The trust that was built between both sides was affected on several occasions: Israelis believe that each one of them represented himself freely, but there are not sure about Palestinians. For Israelis the gathering of Palestinians among themselves gave an impression that they have to make sure they are aligned with the stand of their official authorities, and there is someone who controls from above.

For Palestinians, the different treatment of the Israeli authorities at the airport to them was very annoying, and Palestinians couldn't bear why Israeli participants, who have just been with them in an equal situation, are treated more humanly. There is a certain disappointment from Israeli participants for not acting enough to prevent the extra security checks. Palestinians believe that Israelis are again part of their system, and still serving their state no matter what powerful experience they had in Rome.

Tangible Results

A few collaborations, joint activities and relationships were created between Israelis and Palestinians.

A branch of Education for Life was established in Ramallah and Palestinian and Israelis joined the Israeli and international boards.

There is an understanding of the need to work on the traumas with the public on both sides and with journalists.

Follow up

Two sides felt the lacking of an organized follow up and support. There were some accusations that the organized team didn't take responsibility, or even closed the space after Rome. There was also a claim that time was not given on the 3rd day to create the projects.

The interesting point, is that both Palestinians and Israelis don't feel responsibility to the lack of follow up after Rome, they all believe that it is the coordinators, sponsor or someone else's duty to bring them together again.

The contribution of OST

Most of the people believe that the OS contributed a lot to achieve a very successful, human and an equal meeting. Some believe that if other technique has been used, it wouldn't be such a success.

All interviewed expressed their willingness to participate in OST gatherings that could bring the conflicted sides together. Some prefer to have this gathering abroad again; others prefer to have it in the conflicted area. Some believe that there should be other people involved, others insist on following up with the same people. Some would like to

discuss joint work; others prefer to stay on the theoretical level or to discuss other issues. But all of them agree that OST was one of the best techniques that promoted communication and understanding between them, and enabled them to treat each other respectfully even when discussing very sensitive and complicated issues, as one of the interviews expressed “OST brings the good in people”.