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COEXISTENCES / OCTOBER 2017



OHAD AND SHADEN, BREAKING THE ICE, 2017

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Dear Friends,

Summer is over and the groups we received have gone home. Once again, the emotion of the meeting still echoes in our memories, as does the beautiful concert which concluded the visit of the YMCA Jerusalem Youth Choir. This year was the first time but did not overshadow the other projects: Her Voice and Breaking the Ice.

Again, the pleasure of sharing a few days with Israeli and Palestinian youth gives us the feeling that our efforts contribute to peace and coexistence in the area, discreetly but constantly. We are also pleased to share our experiences with you who read us.

Good reading!

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ADAM AND OR, YMCA CHOIR, 2017



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THE THREE TRIPS OF SUMMER 2017

07-14.07 JERUSALEM YMCA CHOIR

26 girls and boys from East and West Jerusalem, aged 13 to 21, have consolidated their commitment to dialogue and meeting the other, discovered Swiss democracy and won over the audience in two concerts at the United Nations and Lausanne.

Founded in 2013, the YMCA choir is an unusual and unique project. Inspired by projects with a social calling such as the Chicago Children's Choir, the YMCA choir brings together approximately 35 youngsters aged between 13 to 21, girls and boys, Israelis and Palestinians from Jerusalem. It is a place where they sing and dialogue, and also a community, a reference group in which to live one's adolescence in a city torn by divisions and the conflict.

Of the approximately 35 members of the Choir, 26 participated in this first visit to Switzerland and continental Europe. For over half of the group this was their first participation in a tour of the Choir, and for some, their first trip abroad.

Receiving this group was a particularly rich experience due to the multiple levels of complexity: besides comprising Jews and Palestinian Arabs, girls and boys of different ages and who consequently didn't have the same needs and centres of interest, this group comes directly from a conflict zone. Moreover, because the Choir is a project which also aims at encouraging the artistic talents of its participants, the direction of this group has to be adapted to these objectives. These different levels of complexity and the concern to respect the dynamics of the three groups of dialogue forming the Choir are the reason for an unusually large number of facilitators. Even so, neither the size of the group, nor the young age of certain participants, nor the respect of dietary restrictions for the Jewish orthodox participants did not constitute a major obstacle.

Forced to renounce the mountain stay for budgetary reasons (our partner, the YMCA, had unfortunately been unable to raise the funds required for the facilitation), the Choir was received on Friday 7 July for the Lausanne part of their trip and directly taken to the Heights of Aran where the stupefaction in front of the scenery and the weariness from the journey which had started the previous day at midnight from the YMCA in Jerusalem, intermingled. After a presentation by Coexistences and a brief introduction to Switzerland, the group joined their hosting families around a potluck meal. The following morning, Micah Hendler, choir master, and Yair Seri, co-director, started the rehearsals, then each in turn described the work carried out in the Choir and gave the last recommendations before the weekend in the families, either in the mountains or by the lake. The participants were won over by their hosts, touched by the care and concern of their Swiss "parents" to anticipate their emotional needs and share with them "their" Switzerland.

Even though the visit was limited to just one week, it was rich: the presentation of Swiss institutions and the system of direct democracy, the chocolate workshop at the Town Hall in Echallens managed generously by Laurent Duvoisin and his apprentice Christopher, the singing session with fifteen Lausanne singers under the co-direction of the choir master Dominique Tille and Micah Hendler of the YMCA, the day in Geneva with the Red Cross and Red Crescent International Museum then the discovery of the town through a treasure hunt, the visit (and concert) of the United Nations and a relaxing walk on the hillsides of Lavaux under a bright sun, ended with the visit of the church of Saint-Saphorin and its organ... Despite these visits, the group was able to practice singing and dialogue during the daily sessions.

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HOWEVER, THE HIGHLIGHTS OF THIS VISIT WERE THE PUBLIC CONCERTS.

The United Nations Concert on Thursday 12 July in front of more than 80 people, most of them from the United Nations, among whom were representatives from Palestinian and Israeli delegations who talked with the singers. Different circumstances made each of these concerts unique: with the same repertoire, at the United Nations, the Choir was moved at the thought that they were able to bring their message of inclusion and dialogue in this symbolic place. Many in the audience discreetly wiped their tears; difficult to do otherwise in front of the words of this carefully composed repertoire, embodying the project of this Choir. The finale of the concert drew the whole audience into a beautiful canon and an enthusiastic ovation.

The public concert the following day in the church of Saint-Laurent in Lausanne took place before approximately 200 people, among whom a member of the Municipality and an official from the Civil Defence. The concert was a compelling demonstration of coexistence: staging in the space of two short working evenings a wonderful collaboration between adult disciplined singers and a chorale of preadolescents and adolescents to the concept of discipline... divergent. The highlight of the evening was no doubt a song which began in Gruyerian patois, continued in Hebrew and ended in Arabic.

In an explosion of joy, the mission accomplished, the Choir continued in an irresistible and spontaneous movement the celebration on the steps of the church, in a swinging darbouka farandole and collective dance. Some Swiss citizens feared that a police patrol would turn up but either they were far off or they understood how innocent this merriment was. In any event, this second show went on for nearly an hour and astonished a Moroccan passer-by won over by the sight of Arabs and Jews dancing and singing together.

Our warm thanks go to the large Civil Defence team who so kindly and enthusiastically transported this large group habitually late. We were able to express our recognition by inviting them to attend the concert at the United Nations.

When they returned, those in charge of the Choir told us how pleased they were; this trip was an immense success with regard to the internal dynamics they had achieved and the satisfaction of the participants. "We came as a group, we go back as a family" resumes this result. Within the Choir, the unique handicapped person now feels fully integrated.

Our thanks also go to those who contributed to the success of this very special project: the host families, ever since they took up the challenge by committing themselves with us to support this encounter, the members of the Travel organisation group and the Host families group for their solidarity and efficiency, the Communication group for all their work of relay to the medias and the Fund raising group at the origin of the donations. And especially to Yael Ehrenfreund for the French-Hebrew translation on different occasions, to Edgar Bloch for the presentation of the Swiss democratic system, to the Ecole du Valentin and its Principal Ahmad Abu Nijmeh for the loan of the premises for the meetings and rehearsals with the Swiss singers and Dominique Tille, and Eric Bornand for the visit of the vineyards and the church of St-Saphorin.

Finally, we would like to thank the generous donators and in particular the Loterie Romande, for their financial support. Without them this project could not have taken place.

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After 24 hours awake, the choir discovers Lavaux.

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Practical work in chocolate factory.

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Song and capoeira in appreciation of Laurent Duvoisin and his chocolate workshop at Echallens Town Hall.

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Rehearsal with the Lausanne singers and Dominique Tille.

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The CD drivers attended the YMCA Choir concert at the United Nations on 13 July.

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About 80 people, including delegates from Israel and Palestine and many United Nations employees attended the concert of the Choir.

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Explosion of joy after the public concert in the church of Saint-Laurent: Lausanne in the mood of Jerusalem.

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The large choir group and some of the CD drivers at the Place de la Riponne.

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THE THREE TRIPS OF SUMMER 2017

21-29.08

HER VOICE / KOLE'H / SAOUTEK

For the third year running, we opened our doors to *Her Voice*. Under this name, young Israeli Arab and Jewish girls aged 16 to 17 enter into dialogue, supervised by two facilitators, Ulfat Haider and Sarki Golan. The aim of this practice is to render them autonomous in a multicultural society, to reinforce their self-esteem, to develop their self-awareness and clear identity in their respective social environment. The group is obviously renewed each year; this summer ten girls made the journey. The trip to Switzerland was preceded by ten bi-monthly three hour meetings in Israel. On their return, the dialogue work will continue, enriched by the experience of their stay.

Their stay began by three days in Trient where they experienced living together in the chalet generously provided by Béatrice Giovanoli and Alexis Mozer. They arrived with stereotypes and then discovered they had things in common. Cooking together, sharing the same dormitory and the same bathroom brought them closer. Under a radiant sky, they went hiking to Chamonix; then as the rain caught up with them when on the Désalpe road, they challenged each other at the Adventure Park in Aigle. In the evening, down in the plain, they met the families from Lausanne who had come to greet them and who hosted them two by two. Their stay continued by a day of tourism in Bern. A fascinating visit of the Parliament led by Mr. Heymann, a professional guide, gave them an idea of the subtleties of a Federal State. A walk through the Old Town was followed by the visit of the House of Religions. Inaugurated in December 2014, the House harbours places of worship of five religions: Christian (eight different communities), Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist and Alevi (a faith derived from Shia Islam); the synagogue situated close to the display windows presents Judaism.

The weekend started by a meeting between the host families and the girls. Seated round in a circle, each one was able, by the means of an object they had brought with them, to talk about themselves, their family and their daily life. Led by Ulfat and Sarki, one of the exercises used in their group dialogue sessions is: to learn to listen to the other, be free to remain silent, express themselves without judgement. For the families, it was a way for them to access the tools used by the two facilitators and have an idea of the girls' daily work.

The last day, as they were preparing the farewell evening, they told a journalist of the ATS, Laina Berclaz, that " little by little, thanks to the stay in Switzerland, ties had been created, differences had receded. Yasmin says that in Israel, they have the feeling they belong to two cultures; but in Switzerland, 'we were just one. The Swiss were those of a different culture. We were a family.'" Back in Haifa, the girls who will leave an affectionate souvenir with "their" families from Lausanne, want to transmit their experience in Switzerland and what they learnt about the other and their communities. Before we finish this summary our warm thanks go to: the families for their welcome and generosity, the members of Coexistences, and in particular those who organised this trip, for their commitment in time and in kind, Mr. Heymann for the visit of the Federal Palace and the Civil Defence in Yverdon who transported the girls in four different cantons. A special thanks to the two remarkable facilitators, Ulfat Haider and Sarki Golan. It is the ties of friendship forged between them and us over the years and the projects which enable us to carry them out successfully. It is their work day after day in Beit HaGefen in Haifa which allows Israeli Arab and Jewish girls to meet and share these moments of dialogue.

[> Read more in Laina Berclaz' article](#)

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YASMIN ANDT ALAA, HER VOICE, 2017
PHOTO : ALIÉNOR HELD

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The girls of Her Voice 2017 and their host families break the ice by exchanging around an object which represents them.

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At the farewell evening, the participants and their host families share what they have both learned about the dialogue process and the 9 days in Switzerland: their apprehensions, expectations and discoveries. In other words, the many threads which unite them in their diversity and their desire for equity and dignity.

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THE THREE TRIPS OF SUMMER 2017

29.08-12.09 BREAKING THE ICE

Once again, and for the 8th time, Coexistences invited twelve students from Haifa University to come and trek in our Alps at the end of summer 2017. Six were Jewish and six Arab, with each time three boys and three girls. The group had been formed and prepared for the trip since March, led by Ulfat Haider, Palestinian and Asaf Ron, Israeli, acting as facilitators. They landed in Geneva on Tuesday 29 August, accompanied by Asaf while Ulfat was already in Switzerland for the project *Her Voice*.

The stay lasted fifteen days. For the most part it took place in conformity with the previous years: road transport ensured by the Vaudois Civil Defence, housed at La Fouly for the two days before and the two days after the trek, in the chalet generously provided by the Kohler family, end of the stay in Lausanne where the participants were hosted in pairs by youngsters from here, students or not, recruited par Olivia Sandri.

ON OUR MOUNTAINS

The trek lasted nine days and eight nights from 31 August to 8 September. For the 4th time, it was led by Nadja Schmid, a low-mountain range guide, whose competence, kindness and deep understanding of the dialogue process are firmly established. The other accompanying persons were Ulfat, Asaf, as well as François Feihl representing Coexistences.

The route departed from Salvan, through the lakes of Emosson, over the French border to the Terrasse Pass and back into Switzerland by the Balme Pass. After the difficult crossing of the Arpette window (1100 m climb, 1500 m descent), then a day of respite at Champex, came the climb to the cabin of Orny. The last day was the descent to Praz-de-Fort (Val Ferret), where the Civil Defence bus was waiting for us to bring us back to La Fouly. As usual, the nights were spent under tent. The group had to carry their food and kitchen material for three days (refreshment points at Emosson and Champex). The haversacks were heavy (14 - 16 kg!).

The first three days the weather was atrocious, wet, cold and foggy, which led us to spend the third night sheltered from the damp in the dormitories of the Emosson Hostel, luckily vacant. The owner went as far as to let us use the dining room to spread out our wet tents to dry. Should he be thanked in these here! For the remainder of the trek, the weather was much better: no more rain, some cloudy spells and a lot of sun. So we were able to enjoy spectacular views on the Mont-Blanc, visit the renowned site of dinosaur traces above Emosson, spot groundhogs and observe young male mountain goats playing at fighting horn to horn. An unforgettable experience: we were even able to walk on the glacier situated below the Orny cabin, not dangerous because flat, free from snow and crevasses.

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AMINE AND AYA, BREAKING THE ICE, 2017

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BREAKING THE ICE

DIALOGUE CONDITIONS

The arduousness of the trek (6 to 8 h a day, heavy haversacks, steep slopes, rain the first days), the organisation required to put up the tents and to cook are the elements which stimulated solidarity, creating favourable conditions for dialogue. This is the key concept of *Breaking the Ice*. In fact, discussions went well during the different stages, including the most difficult subjects touching on narratives. Sometimes they became very heated but without ever degenerating. On the way, we took advantage of the pauses for dialogue activities led in turn by each participant, under the supervision of Ulfat and Asaf. The activities continued in the evening after eating: debriefing of the day, reading of someone's resume (often very funny, written in turn by each participant), and finally the "life story", each one presenting to the others her/his biography.

The discussions were initiated in turn by each one, with the uniform desire to get to the root of things. Hence, no leader emerged, they were all at the same level. This can explain that, the collective mood was nearly always cheerful, moral uniformly good and hardly influenced by the weather. François Feihl, who has accompanied all the *Breaking the Ice* groups since the programme exists, considers that they were all excellent, but that this one clearly stood out by each participant's enthusiasm for in-depth exchanges on sensitive subjects.

Back at La Fouly, during the general debriefing, everyone agreed that what they had lived was a "life changing experience":

- Kahled: "We have opened a new chapter in our life. We can now have friends in the other camp";
- Alon: "We return home with the motivation to extend our experience beyond our circle".

THEIR PROJECT BACK AT HOME

The last morning at La Fouly was devoted to defining a community project to execute after their return to Israel. This happens each year but this group distinguished itself by its pragmatism (not to aim too high, better something modest that we can be sure to realise) and came to a detailed proposal.

General purpose: the one specified by Alon. Means: during the coming months, organise three meetings where everyone brings along one or more of her/his friends.

- Meeting 1: 23 October 2017, just before the start of the term, an afternoon's walk in the countryside around Haifa University, followed by an outdoors meal in the evening.
- Meeting 2: evening in a cafe to listen to Arabic and Jewish music, possibly inviting singers.
- Meeting 3: potluck meal at the house of one of the group members.

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BREAKING THE ICE

SOME SPECIAL MOMENTS OF THIS VISIT...

- during the transfer from Cointrin to La Fouly, a stop in Lausanne for lunch at the Valentin Catholic School, initiated by the principal, Ahmad Abu Nijmeh;
- the following day, a buffet-reception organised by the authorities, represented by Madame Dominique Coppey, in charge of cultural affairs and information in the Commune of Orsières;
- Saturday 2 September, Danielle Kohler and Chistian Sinobas braved the weather and the cold to bring supplies and additional warm clothes to Emosson;
- the last two days of the trek, accompanied by an Israeli journalist-cameraman. *Breaking the Ice* obtains, for the first time since 2010, coverage on an important channel of Israeli television, Canal 2, on 16 September 2017

> to discover here

- on Saturday 9 September, fondue-raclette at the Glaciers Hotel in La Fouly, where four members of Coexistences were able to meet the group.

... AND ITS CONCLUSION

For the farewell party in Lausanne, on 11 September, a new formula was inaugurated: an aperitif between 17h and 20h, in order to leave the group free to spend the rest of the evening with the Swiss youngsters who hosted them. The Kohlers made their house available, Dominique prepared a delicious and abundant spread, and the vibrant, merry atmosphere reflected what had been experienced throughout the trek.

A final personal consideration from François Feihl: "*Breaking the Ice* incited me to learn Hebrew, as the discussions take place in this language. I more or less master it and so I wanted to make the effort to learn Arabic (6 week's intensive course last spring). The Arab participants noticed that, were very touched, and for the first time I felt that the cultural barrier which before had constituted a difficulty in my relationship with them fall away."

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08.09
Orny glacier.
From left to right. In front crouching: Sheli, Aya, Asaf, Amin. Standing: Ohad, Alon, Shaden, May, Motti, Abed, Noah, Olfat, Raneen, Khaled.

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COMBATANTS FOR PEACE NOMINATED FOR THE NOBEL PRIZE FOR PEACE!

From 1 to 8 March 2009 we received the group *Wounded Crossing Borders*, which brought together Israeli and Palestinian ex wounded combatants. Co-led by the Palestinian Sulaiman Khatib and the Israeli Gadi Kenny, this group decided to lay down their arms and dialogue with the enemy in order to build a common future in peace.

In 2006, the same Sulaiman Khatib founded with the Israeli Chen Alon *Combatants for Peace*, which originally also assembled ex Israeli soldiers and Palestinian combatants and which expanded to people who were not involved in the violence. Through a commitment to non-violence and strictly proportionality between Israelis and Palestinians, it resists the occupation and violence from all sides and forms the basis of a future coexistence.

This group has just been nominated the Nobel Prize for Peace 2018 by a sociology professor at the University of Massachusetts. The Norwegian Nobel committee will examine this proposal in 2018 and the laureate will be known in October.

Our congratulations for their nomination and their tenacious commitment in favour of peace!

NEWS FROM IN BETWEEN

This brief and viral film project, supported thanks to a *We make it* campaign, has become a long-term project. The funds raised have enabled the creation of a documentary, *We can talk*, realised last year by Moriya Benavot and Uri Levi. Showed in Kfar HaNokdim during the gathering on the occasion of our tenth anniversary in October 2016, this film has been a source of inspiration for young Israeli and Palestinian film makers. This project is followed up in Israel by Shira Lapidot, who worked as a facilitator in a YMCA youth group, which came to Switzerland in 2012.

At the end of a first selection last December of 13 scripts out of the 37 submitted, three films were chosen this summer by an Israeli, Palestinian, Swiss and French jury. A diffusion campaign should begin at the end of autumn, organised by students at Sapir College in Sderot.

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GENERAL ASSEMBLY

These films will be presented at the general assembly on **9 November at 19h at the CPO**, chemin de Beau-Rivage 2 in Lausanne. All are welcome!