

A Summer Of Nonviolence

Monday, 12 July 2010

Mariam spent the early summer working with Holy Land Trust as part of her master's program in peace studies. Although back at home, she is already missed.

It's been just over a week since I got back from the West Bank and the beautiful town of Bethlehem. It's amazing how 6 weeks can totally destabilise 23 years of a way of life. I've had the strangest time trying to readjust and as one friend put it, am probably in culture shock.

This is the immediate effect my time with the Holy Land Trust (HLT) has had on me. I am excited to see what other will creep up in the coming weeks.

The time I spent with HLT was totally heart-and-mind-changing, a real challenge and totally overwhelming, all in a wonderful way. Coming back I feel like I've left a part of me behind and I feel like I've been detached from a place that truly felt like home. Before I get into the work side of things, on a very personal note, all the staff and specifically the Nonviolence team truly made me feel like one of the team. I am so grateful for them allowing me to be so deeply apart of the team and of their lives.

Spending six weeks with HLT involved attending several non-violence trainings in various villages such as Dar el-Salah and Beit Fa'jar. I also visited homes that had been knocked down by the Israeli military and are now being rebuilt with the help of the HLT. I had the opportunity to attend a three-day Compassionate Listening Training programme as well as have the experience of a Global Village Square meeting amidst Israelis, Palestinians and Internationals. Within my first week I had taken part in a protest in Hebron and at Al Massra. I also got to meet and hear so many great people like Mark Braverman and Carl Madearis speak and share their stories and their work. Being so central in Bethlehem, I had the ease of moving around and interviewing other prominent leaders in the areas and through the help of HLT I was able to meet directors at Aida and Dheisheh Refugee camps as well as visit Al Azza camp.

My time there was mixed with so many emotions and experiences, I truly came to understand that each person has a narrative to tell, most of them very difficult to comprehend. I got to experience the beautiful resilience of the Palestinian people and their determination to succeed in life despite their surroundings. And I truly got to see the effects of the Israeli occupation on the West Bank, its restrictions, its dehumanisation, its ability to quench anyone's breath through the sight of the wall. Every time I walked around I couldn't believe and felt anger that yet again the world was allowing something like this to continue and to happen. What was mind blowing for me was how much people cling to hope and continue to work knowing that eventually what is theirs will have to be returned to them and that Justice will be the victor.

The people I met, the things I saw, the places I visited have all left such a permanent mark on me, I saw humanity at its best and at its worst and experienced the difficulties of those two extremes living together. The experience was certainly a growing one for me and I gained immensely more than I could have possible given.

My thanks goes to Nonviolence team member Lubna Bandak, who allowed me to shadow her and her wonderful work and to the whole HLT staff who I now consider family and friends. I can't wait to get back there and hope that I can continue to allow the effects of this short but immense trip permeate my life.

Contact Palestine@holylandtrust.org for more information on how to set up an internship or structured volunteering in the Holy Land.