

PRAY God of all ages,
you send your Son, Jesus, to
heal those who hurt among
us. You call us to continue
Jesus' healing work. Come,

Lord Jesus, make us
healers. Our Lady of
Guadalupe, help us
build bridges between
peoples. Amen.



By Joan Mitchell, CSJ

When Evgenia Grinblo
heard rockets coming
toward her home in
Akko, she took cover with her
family. Their entire neighborhood
in this city near Israel's border with
Lebanon was bombed. One bomb
hit 100 yards away. The family
moved to a kibbutz for six weeks.

Evgenia feared not only for herself
and her family but for the lives of
friends who live in the West Bank, the
landlocked Palestinian territory within
Israel. Evgenia is a Seed, a young
person who has participated in *Seeds of
Peace* Camp, a month-long experience
for teens who grow up in countries
in conflict. She no longer believes in
taking sides.

Evgenia had arrived home from
boarding school only the day before
the bombing. "In this war situation
I did feel a desire to identify with my
country," she says. "But I knew not all
the Palestinians are our enemies and
hate us. I worried about my friends
who live in the West Bank at the same
time my family was feeling animosity
toward them. I don't believe in
choosing a side. Once you do you are
not helping."



Evgenia Grinblo

A Seed is one of 7,000 young
people who have participated in
Seeds of Peace since its founder
John Wallach started it in 1993
(seedsofpeace.org). Delegations of
teens come to camp from countries in
conflict, such as Afghanistan, Egypt,
India, Israel, Jordan, Pakistan, and
Palestine. Seeds participate in online
forums and stay in touch with friends
by cell phone in peace and war.

"Zeina lives a couple hundred
meters from my house in Jerusalem,"
says Israeli Ariel, 15,
motioning toward the
girl beside him. "But at
home we would never
meet because she is
Palestinian." At camp
they have become
friends.

On the playing fields
in the Maine woods
Palestinians and Israelis
play baseball, soccer,
field hockey, basketball,
and tennis together.

3rd Sunday of Advent



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SPiRIT

Teens from "the other side" swim, race
canoes, and try water skiing together.
They sing, bead, work on computers,
and make friends across borders.

John Wallach started *Seeds of Peace*
after the first bombing of the World
Trade Center. He aimed to bring
Israeli and Arab youth together long
enough to break their stereotypes
of one another and reach across the
boundaries that separate them.

Daily Dialogue Sessions, start in
camp with trained facilitators
running these discussions.
Teens learn what their opinions mean
in the context of others' lives. No one
has to change his or her mind but
they do have to learn to listen to one
another's stories rather than debate
facts, history, or policies.

Evgenia went to *Seeds of Peace*
Camp in Maine in 2003, when she was



Photo Courtesy of Seeds of Peace

No OTHER Side





Photo Courtesy of Seeds of Peace

15. Afterwards she began attending a United World College in Wales, a boarding school with students of 75 nationalities.

“The second Lebanon war in 2006 was the only time I experienced the war physically,” says Evgenia. “But the fear and stress are always there. It’s possible to drive along the separation wall that surrounds the West Bank and be oblivious to the fact that another country is there.”

At *Seeds of Peace* Evgenia learned not to let her identity as an Israeli speak for her. “If I hadn’t met people at a very young age that listened to the same ridiculous pop music as I did, I wouldn’t know how much we have in common. All I saw as a child growing up on TV were labels. Humans have this natural tendency to make sense of things by putting them in strict categories.”

The Grinblo family immigrated from Siberia when Evgenia was seven. Her father is Jewish, her

mother’s family Christian. Because Jewish people trace their ancestry through their mothers, Evgenia is not regarded as Jewish in Israel. “At home I’m the Russian girl,” she explains. “In the U.S. I’m the Jewish girl.” She has grown up culturally Middle Eastern.

Now as a college junior, Evgenia recognizes *Seeds of Peace* changed her life. Camp activities aim to help teens find all they have in common. The month ends in three days of Color Games. “We forget about who is Israeli and who is Palestinian and work together as the Green Team or Blue Team to compete,” says Evgenia.

The high ropes course was most life changing for Evgenia. “Each of us goes up with someone from ‘the other side,’” she remembers. “One gets blindfolded and the other has to help the person through this very scary course. When I came back to the ground, I literally saw with fresh eyes. I had to trust and rely on the other person for my safety and well being. Once that person was

there for me, I realized my opinions of those on the other side were not based in reality.

“Since *Seeds of Peace*, I’m a better listener. I follow my natural inclination to dig deeper and understand people’s motivation, the road they walked on to get to where they are. Why are they saying what they are saying? Why they do what they do? What feelings do they have about me that are influencing the way they see things?”

Dialogue sessions make the difference for many *Seeds*. “Everyone has hard feelings for the other side. No one wants to listen,” says Ahmed, a *Seed* from Gaza. “But we learned how to really listen and to understand, and at some point I started to see the good in people from the other side—I realized they are just humans.

“I found the best moments are when you see the rest of your group listening to your stories, paying attention to every word you say about yourself, your family, your life. You then feel safe among people who care about you.”

Ophir from Jerusalem remembers shouting during dialogues, even yelling, out of anger and despair. “I realized that both sides have two different versions of history and facts,” he says. “When both sides



Photo Courtesy of Seeds of Peace

try to convince the other that they are on the right side, the other side rejects the attempt with anger. I realized that if you want to learn and really know what is going on, you must listen to personal stories.”

“It was difficult hearing people who were against my thoughts, against my beliefs, against what I think is right,” says Yasser from Ramallah in the West Bank. He discovered that a *Seed* named Roni and he were really on the same side: the side of peace.

“There was a lot of yelling and screaming between us at first,” says Yasser, until he followed a



Photo Courtesy of Seeds of Peace

SUNDAY GOSPEL

3rd Sunday of Advent

Are you the one we've been looking for?

NARRATOR: When John the Baptist heard in prison about the works Jesus was doing, he sent two of his disciples to him.

DISCIPLE 1: Tell us, are you the one to come?

DISCIPLE 2: Or should we expect someone else?

JESUS: Go back and tell John what you hear and see: the blind can see; the lame walk; lepers are cured; the deaf hear; the dead are raised to life; and the poor have the good news preached to them. Blessed are those who do not stumble because of me.

NARRATOR: As John's disciples were leaving, Jesus spoke about him to the crowds.

JESUS: What did you go into the desert to see? A blade of grass bending in the wind? A man dressed up in fancy clothes? People who dress like that live in palaces! Tell me, what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, indeed, but you saw much more than a prophet. For about this man scripture says, "I will send my messenger ahead of you to prepare your way before you." I assure you that John the Baptist is greater than anyone who has ever lived. But the least one in the kingdom of heaven is greater than John.

Matthew 11.2-11

facilitator's advice to speak with one mouth and hear with two ears. "Roni and I started talking outside of dialogue. We apologized for hurting each other's feelings. We started having fun in Group Challenge, and over time, developed a positive friendship."

"Through dialogue, I learned how important it is to listen, and not just talk," says Ibrahim from Bethlehem. "When I first met Israeli Seeds, I thought they had come to talk *about* us. I thought they hated us. I discovered in dialogue that they came to talk *to* us. If we listen to them, they will listen to us."

"It's a big responsibility to be a Seed," says Evgenia. "I can't erase the experience. I understand that my choices as an individual really do matter. It's a weight you have to learn how to carry."

When she participated in the *Seeds of Peace* internal forum, Evgenia talked with youth freshly out of camp and recognized her thinking had grown and blossomed. "Camp is just the beginning of the story. Both sides want the same things—safe, healthy, prosperous, long lives."

QUESTIONS

- 1 How does listening to others' stories rather than debating help resolve conflict?
- 2 Why doesn't taking sides help?
- 3 When has real dialogue changed your mind about a person?
- 4 What difference do you think 4,000 Seeds can make in our world?
- 5 How does Jesus change his world?
- 6 What is great about John the Baptist?

OUR CATHOLIC FAITH

Communicating for Peace

By Anna Zaros

A second prophet named Isaiah speaks a vision of peace and new life in Sunday's first reading. This Isaiah lived 200 years after the first prophet who urged us to pound our swords into plowshares. Second Isaiah's poetic preaching forms chapters 40-55 of the book of Isaiah in the Old Testament.

Second Isaiah lived among the Israelites whom Babylonians took into captivity after defeating the southern kingdom and destroying Jerusalem and its temple in 587 B.C. The exiled people lived in Babylon for 50 years. Then Persian king Cyrus began to win victories against the Babylonian empire.

Second Isaiah saw God at work in these victories. The prophet inspired the exiled people with his message that the same God who once made a dry path through the sea will smooth and straighten a road home across the 1,000 miles of desert wilderness between Babylon and Jerusalem.

Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened; and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then shall the lame leap like a hart; and the tongues of the dumb sing for joy. For waters shall break forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert.

A highway will be there; it will be called the Holy Way. The redeemed will walk there; the ransomed of the Holy One shall return and come to Zion with singing.

Isaiah 35.5-6, 8-10

When John the Baptist sends messengers in Sunday's gospel to ask if Jesus is the one who is to come, he is asking if Jesus is the one who will restore the world as Isaiah envisioned. Jesus doesn't answer John's question directly. Instead Jesus names six ways he continues the healing work of the God who led Israel home from exile. He gives sight to the blind, healing to lepers, leaping legs to the lame, hearing to the deaf, life to the dead, good news to the poor.

Jesus calls us who follow him to continue his mission. We can bring peace, healing, and new life to our world by following the example of Jesus, by helping those who are the poor and blind of our time.

We can also continue Jesus' mission by fostering peace with the people in our lives. As Palestinian and Israeli teens find at Seeds of Peace Camp, many of us can't talk about rules, politics, religion, grades, dating with friends and family without getting into a fight. Seeds learn to listen to the stories of one another's lives. How we speak and listen are crucial to forming peaceful relationships.

One way to communicate peacefully is by using a tool called "Nonviolent Communication." It was developed by a psychologist named Marshall Rosenberg. Nonviolent communication fosters compassion and works to meet everyone's needs, especially when a conflict arises.



The four steps of nonviolent communication can work in conflicts with friends, families, and teachers. Dr. Rosenberg has used nonviolent communication with people dealing with violent conflict in their lives.

First, observe what is happening. Without awareness most of us see others' ideas only from our own perspective. We have to work at seeing another person's point of view. In step one I state what I observe about a disagreement, free of evaluation. For example, if I feel a friend is not listening to me, instead of saying, "You're a bad listener," I can say, "When I am having a conversation with you, you often don't look me in the eye."

Second, state how I feel. Often when we state how we feel during a disagreement, we place blame on others; for example, we say, "You make me mad." In step two of nonviolent communication I try to communicate how I feel without upsetting the person that I am in disagreement with. I can say simply, "I am feeling unhappy."

Third, state what I need. If a person isn't looking me in the eye when he or she talks to me, I can explain that makes me think he or she isn't trying to understand what I am saying. I can say, "I am in need of some understanding. I feel unhappy because my need for understanding is not being met right now."

Fourth, make a request. Requests identify concrete, positive actions I need in a conflict. I can say, "If you can look me in the eye when we have a conversation, that will help me know you are trying to understand me." Requests help people with whom we disagree understand exactly what they can do to meet our needs.

In this style of communicating each person honestly expresses and truly listens to the observations, feelings, needs,



and requests of the other without using judgment or blame. Communicating this way helps us connect to persons we may be disagreeing with and express compassion towards them.

Building peace isn't easy and neither is communicating with others, let alone communicating peacefully! But if we can take little steps to communicate in more loving and compassionate ways, we can make a big contribution to peace in our lives and in our world.

FAITH in ACTION

- 1 How do you communicate with your friends, family, teachers?
- 2 How do you communicate with these same people when you have a disagreement? How would you like to communicate with them when you have a disagreement?
- 3 Where do you see violence in the world? How can peace be built in those places? Spend some time reading the newspaper to learn about global conflict situations and how peace builders are working in these situations.
- 4 Join a youth organization for peace. Or start a club at your school that works to raise awareness about social justice issues you are passionate about.