**NEYM Quakers further the Dialogue on Israeli-Palestinian Relations: Impressions from the Living Faith Day 2018**

On April 15 in Portland ME 130 Friends gathered at the Living Faith Day. One gripping and controversial program was the Israel Palestinian panel and, in the afternoon, an anti-Semitism workshop.

We had four guest speakers on the 60-minute panel. Two were Jewish and two were Palestinian. Martha Yager, a Quaker from Providence MM, led the panel. Another Friend, Steve Chase, formerly of NEYM but currently working in Washington DC, spoke about his journey from being a Zionist Quaker to a human rights activist. Each speaker had 5 minutes to speak to queries such as:

What has been your journey in coming to understand Israel/Palestine—both the dream and the reality? What has been your journey in coming to understand the intersections of anti-­Semitism, Islamophobia, and racism?

What are the listeners’ take-home messages?

There are many narratives from Israelis, Palestinians, Jews, Muslims, Americans who were raised Zionist. We are not fighting for only Israeli or Palestinian rights. We are united to fight for human rights. We often find that informal conversations on the violence in Palestine/Israel disintegrate quickly. Quakers become scared, triggered and defensive. Many Quakers avoid talking about Gaza, Israeli aggressions, settlements, and Hamas. We know we are complicit in the strangling of life and systemic dominance. We obfuscate structural violence with personal stories. If Quakers as a body state that they support Israel, then I personally am denied my voice (or feel threatened). Quakers avoid talking about these painful dilemmas, letting silence be our message.

In the afternoon we had 25 Friends of all ages throughout New England join us for a 90-minute workshop on anti-Semitism. We started with worship knowing that we in that room had personal struggles. We also had spiritual struggles knowing the current war in the Middle East steals human life. How do Quakers deal with our own tattered clothes of anti-Semitism that veil our witness of love to Semite peoples?

Here are questions that we spoke about in pairs around the room. We offer the questions as ideas for Quakers to discuss in small groups.

* What is your earliest memory of Jewish people and/or Judaism?
* What was your response when you first heard about the 6 million Jews who had been murdered by the Nazi Government?
* Describe the first time you saw or experienced anti-Semitism.
* What was your first reaction upon hearing about the establishment of the modern state of Israel?
* How has your understanding of anti-Semitism changed over the years?

Can Quakers get clear about the following terms?--

* Anti-Semitism Anti-Zionism Anti-Israeli Anti-Jewish
* Racism in the Middle East
* Islamophobia in the US and Middle East

The NEYM minute 2017 asks us “to examine how anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, racism, and privilege affect our understanding of the conflict.” The NEYM Israel-Palestine Working Group would like to explore our stories with questions such as the 5 ones above. Can we unearth deeper understanding of anti-Semitism’s evil?

We are asking Friends to name the System of oppression in Israel; we are not blaming Israelis or Palestinians. How do we act nonviolently towards people who are the enforcers of the System?

We also ask ourselves, how can Friends become nimble in stopping abusive language (They are terrorists. They never wanted to negotiate peace.) Can we find ways to stay in dialogue when a person starts to attack? Aggressive language can lead to fear and sometimes increases hate. We need to develop strategies to keep the group conversation going even when a few people are offensive.

How is God’s power different than the world’s power? Let us live in that power.

Minga Claggett-Borne :: May 2018