

The Center for  
*Mind-Body Medicine*<sup>®</sup>

5225 Connecticut Avenue NW, Suite 414 • Washington, DC 20015  
TEL: (202) 966 - 7338 • FAX (202) 966 - 2589 • [center@cmbm.org](mailto:center@cmbm.org) • [www.cmbm.org](http://www.cmbm.org)

**A Report to Friends and Supporters  
on the CMBM's *Healing the Wounds of War* in Israel  
July 4-9, 2004**

James S. Gordon, M.D.

I've just come back from a powerful, touching, surprising and inspiring week, leading our *Healing the Wounds of War* program in Israel, and I wanted to share with you my excitement about completing our first training with Israeli mental health professionals.

This work in the Middle East, as you probably know, is based on our groundbreaking program in Kosovo where our model (which combines psychological self-care, mind-body medicine and group support) is now central to the entire community mental health system. This is the first time that mind-body medicine has ever been successfully used on a nation-wide scale. We are beginning to publish research on the clinical efficacy of this work (I'm enclosing a copy of our first published paper); on the central role it plays in helping mental health professionals to deal with their own trauma and stress; and on the CMBM's program's role and effectiveness in a national system of mental health. It is this work which prompted Israeli and Palestinian leaders in mental health to ask us to come. And it is this work which we are now beginning to share with Israelis, and with Palestinians in both Gaza and the West Bank.

The initial training took place in Israel at the Shoresh conference center, just northwest of Jerusalem. Sixty-six professionals - leaders in psychology, psychiatry, and social work who are dealing with the massive psychological trauma that war and terrorism have brought to the Israeli population - came to the first program. We selected our participants from almost a hundred and twenty applicants. Most of those who had applied, had looked at our website and then called or sent letters and e-mails: "*We are highly skilled*", they wrote us, "*at working with individuals who have been traumatized, and we are overwhelmed by the magnitude of the problem. We believe that your model offers a way of working effectively with far larger numbers of people.*"

Many of the country's major trauma organizations, including the Israel Center for Psychotrauma, Hadassah Hospital, Haifa University, Natal, and the Israeli Ministry of Education, sent three or more representatives. We had participants who work in hospital settings, in specialized clinics for older people, and in emergency services for those wounded in, witnessing or bereaved by bus bombings. More than half of those who came deal primarily with the psychological trauma suffered by Israeli children who have lost parents or siblings, been wounded by or witnessed deadly attacks.

Leading academic researchers came, as did psychologists who are responsible for mental health services in beleaguered settlements and psychiatrists coordinating massive hospital and community-based programs. Our participants included secular and orthodox Jews, Rabbis and Arab Israelis.

This was an extraordinarily knowledgeable group of men and women. Many have been doing trauma work for ten or twenty years. They've created and led programs, studied mind-body approaches, and published papers on psychological trauma.

As we approached the training, our Israeli partners (from the Center for Traumatic Stress and Anxiety Disorders at Hadassah Hospital), were a little uneasy as well as excited. "*Israelis*", our colleagues warned us, "*love to argue, and we're almost always sure that we're right. We come late to conferences, make noisy and disruptive exits, and respond endlessly to cell phones.*"

We were all delightfully surprised when everyone was on time. They turned off their cell phones and listened attentively. The challenging questions participants asked were heartfelt and thoughtful. In the small groups they shared their concerns with candor and with vulnerability.

Virtually everyone who came described being overwhelmed by the tragedy around them, and the threats to them and their children. They did drawings which showed them burdened by never-ending responsibility and guilt and shame at not doing more: There were trees overburdened with fruit to pick; fires burning out of control; huge sacks of responsibilities on the shoulders of ordinary size people.

Beneath the differences in dress of orthodoxy and secularism, across the gap of political disagreement, participants found common experience and concerns. They spoke of the deep grief of wounded veterans and orphans; the terrible pain and contradictions of living and working in some settlements; their distress at the anger, depression and disturbance of so many school children.

Almost every participant spoke of deaths and injuries from terrorist attacks claiming family members and friends – deaths that echoed the death and disappearance of parents and grandparents in the Holocaust. Some saw, for the first time, the connection between their personal history of pain and the work they'd embraced. A psychologist spoke of her mother. This woman's parents and all of her siblings had died in Auschwitz. She never talked to her son about her lost family. Now he was working to help Israeli children to share their feelings about parents lost in suicide bombings. A psychiatrist whose own family history had disappeared in the fires of the crematorium, was helping family members of bus-bombing victims to reclaim remains and to mourn those they'd lost.

The participants used the mind-body techniques we taught them (several kinds of guided imagery, written exercises and drawings) to define the beginnings of solutions to work

problems, organizational overload, and personal pain. They shared themselves in words, drawings and gestures of affection. And they showed one another photographs of their own beloved children, emblems of the future and of hope.

We ate together, did yoga – and even found a way for secular and orthodox to dance comfortably in the same room. And we marveled often at how all of us, coming from such deeply different worlds and traditions, felt so at ease with one another.

Virtually every one of the participants wants to come to our Advanced Training - where we'll teach them to lead the groups in which they participated this first week. They want to make our work their own, to bring the spirit of loving respect as well as the techniques that we teach, to the soldiers and families, the children and old folks with whom they work.

Many also want to work with us in an ongoing way, to reach out more to Arabs within Israel and to Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank and to share with them what they are learning - our spirit of respectful acceptance as well as the philosophy and practice of mind-body approaches.

Almost everyone who came wrote appreciative letters about their experience. They wanted to thank the U.S. Congress, the Oak Foundation, and Unity Through Sharing, which helped to fund our first workshop as well as our supportive Board members, Don de Laski and Lyn Rales. They also wanted to communicate to those we hope will support our future work. I'm enclosing a few of the letters for you to read. Finally, I'm sending along a poem about our training by one of the participants, a nurse. When she was a child, her own parents perished in the Holocaust, and neighbors who hid her saved her life. Now, many years later, she works to set up community-based programs for traumatized children.

I want to thank all of you for the support you've given to us in the past and to share with you this work which you've helped to make possible. I take great joy and pride in it, and I hope you do as well.

With gratitude and love,

Jim