



April 2011

My Perceptions and Me...

"We live in a society obsessed with physical perfection, surrounded by images of unattainable beauty. Nine out of ten women in Britain are unhappy with their appearance... Meanwhile, half a million people in Britain have a serious facial disfigurement, and must counter the negative connotations many of us apply to such differences on a daily basis."

So begins the series summary of Channel 4's **Beauty & the Beast: ugly face of prejudice**, which was shown on television earlier this year.

The summary goes on, *"This series investigates the extremes of dissatisfaction and discrimination by bringing together two people defined by the way they look, but who approach the beauty debate from very different sides."*

The series asks a profound question: Will their shared experience change their perceptions of each other?

This is a fundamental question for our partners working for peace and reconciliation in the Middle East – can talking and sharing together, even when there is history of conflict and a very real difference in backgrounds and beliefs, change your perceptions of another person? They are working hard to ensure the answer is yes.

Through a new partnership with Musalaha Ministry of Reconciliation, in the West Bank, BibleLands aims to equip women to become agents of change in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, by helping to provide training in conflict resolution for Palestinian women. (Musalaha has found that Israeli and Palestinian women often don't meet on equal terms due to differences in education and confidence – which is often far greater on the part of Israeli women. The training balances this situation by providing Palestinian women with resources and tools to become better equipped for dialogue and reconciliation.) The female voice can be a powerful influence in conflict resolution and reconciliation, and Musalaha enable Palestinian women to meet with their Israeli counterparts to build relationships and seek peace.

Louise Thomsen, Musalaha's Women's Co-ordinator, describes the profound impact she witnessed during a recent women's conference:

"During our discussions, almost all the women expressed pain and suffering in their life caused by the conflict. As we listened to the personal testimonies of hardship, the women started asking each other 'What do you need from me in order to soften your pain?' We often hear the words

blame, guilt, apology, repentance, forgiveness – and maybe we have become too focused on these concepts because, as we asked the question that we should have asked a long time ago, not one woman said that she needed an apology or for someone to admit guilt and ask for forgiveness. All that the women asked each other to do was listen. Listen to my pain, my suffering, my truth, my narrative. You don't have to agree with it but accept it as mine."

Because the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is so complex and often appears hopeless, it is easy to despair that small steps are not worth taking in the journey towards reconciliation. However, through our work with Musalaha we aim to change people's perceptions of each other through sharing, talking and listening, and so bring the prospect of peace and reconciliation a little closer.

For more information about our work, visit the About Us section of our website. If you would like to donate to our work (either a one-off or a regular gift) you can donate online (www.biblelands.org.uk) or by calling 01494 897950. Thank you!