

Communologue – The Magical Creation of the Imago Peace Project

**“It is impossible to create a healthy culture if we refuse to meet, and if we refuse to listen. But if we meet, and when we listen, we reweave the world into wholeness.”
Margaret Weatly, 2002.**

The Imago Peace Project grew as a response to the tragedy of September 11, 2001 and the desire within the Imago community to contribute towards peaceful solutions to conflicts within groups and larger communities. The Peace Project group, initiated by Allan Schiffer, felt that their most important contribution would be to develop the core Imago concept of the Couples Dialogue, created in 1988 by Harville Hendrix and Helen Lakelly Hunt, into a form that would work in larger settings. They’ve experienced that the Imago processes of mirroring, validation and empathy, modified to fit a group setting, provide the same benefits to groups or communities that it provides in dyads: safety, freedom from reactivity, assurance of being listened to, and most of all - connection.

At the same time, the Imago community was facing an internal challenge, as instead of one flourishing organization, there were two different ones, overwhelmed by a lot of tension and hurt feelings. The founders of the Peace Project identified the longing for unity, for dialogue, and for peace.

This background provided a fertile soil and roots for the birth of Communologue (a construct of the words “community” and “dialogue”),

a powerful dialogical tool for safe communication and connection in and between groups. Communologue is a guided process, which creates and maintains a conversational space; where diversity is welcomed and all feel heard, understood, and respected. Communologue provides a unique opportunity for communities to move from entrenched conflict and distrust into a space of compassion, deep understanding, and a free-flowing exchange of ideas.

While not specifically task oriented, nor a technique for problem-solving or conflict resolution, Communologue is a process of coming together in a reliably safe space where tasks may be accomplished, problems may be solved, and conflicts may be resolved.

Since 2001 Communologue has been taught and applied to many settings around the world, ranging from the intimate (family groupings, support groups, committees) to larger community settings (work settings, schools, community groups, Imago communities), and to international issues such as the Palestinian-Israeli Imago Project, and the work with the Rwanda's delegation to the U.N. Communologue was also adapted as the main communication tool in Imago conferences, and many other Imago settings.

In 2002, while I was working at the Israeli Center for Treatment of Psycho-Trauma, I initiated the Israeli Palestinian Imago Project with the purpose of using the Imago tools and the power of couples, to bridge the gap between Palestinians and Israelis, and to create a safe place and welcoming atmosphere for dialogue and Communologue between individuals, couples and communities. The project was based on the words of the Dalai Lama, that if one wants to bring peace, he must first bring it to his own home. The idea was to bring together Palestinian and Israeli couples, have them go

through the GTLYW (Getting the Love You Want) couples' workshop together, and then take the deep connection, openness, safety and understanding created in the workshop to the Communologue process between the two groups, Palestinians and Israelis. Together with the Palestinian co-leader of the project, Prof. Mohammed Shahin from Al-Quds university in Jerusalem, and the assistance of the members of the Peace Project, the first group was formed, and the project has begun with the support of the Imago organization matching funds. The first meeting was conducted in Istanbul, Turkey, to eliminate possible political distractions. The program started with a GLYW workshop to ground everyone in the general Imago mindset, followed by a two-day Communologue session. It was felt that Communologue alone could not handle the level of emotion expected without the couple's preparation. The participants were promised safety to touch any subject they wished and to test the process to the limit. This structure was formed and accepted by all participants.

Thus, a place of equality was created at the first Istanbul meeting and the meetings that followed, where equality had not been recognized before. Everyone learned that two entirely different cultures were represented there, a fact they acknowledged in a far more profound way than they had ever known before. A second and wider form of equality came as both sides learned about life stories. "Once we got down to the painful issues behind our present quarrels, we found out how similar we really are."

It was also learned that it is vital for the Communologue leaders to be flexible. For example, the GTLYW guided imagery uses metaphors that were found totally inappropriate and had to be radically changed. For example, using the metaphor of crossing the bridge, reminded the

Palestinians of check points at the borders, while telling them to go to a safe place brought the reaction that for them there is no safe place. Another example was that while the Arab couples were quite willing to work hard during class from 9AM to 7PM, they then also wanted to have fun, to enjoy Istanbul, its large bazaar and restaurants. In one of the project's most memorable experiences, all participants went out to dinner at a Turkish restaurant. On their large table the owners put American, Israeli and Palestinian flags. Other Arab diners asked the Palestinians why they were sitting with Israelis. With great courage they answered, "They are our friends!!" So, it was important to accede to the needs and desires of the group and adjust plans "on the fly," so to speak.

All in all, it was a grand success. After the Istanbul workshop, for a couple of years, several other meetings of the group have been held. Learning continued, bonding deepened. Relationships were permanently altered.

The most amazing meeting of all was held in May 2007, when children and grandchildren of the couples were invited to come with the adults as a part of a family workshop. 48 people attended this inspiring meeting. Prof. Mohammed Shaheen and I led the program, with Dorsey Cartwright and Neil Mielli, from the Imago Peace Project, and two additional facilitators, Palestinian and Israeli, were invited to help integrate the younger participants into the program. The final Communologue session had the children in the center in a kind of fishbowl, with adults around them. There was a wonderful bonding, with the children even more adept at the Imago principles than their parents.

Following the success of the Palestinian Israeli project, Nili Gur from Imago Israel, I, and a member of the Former project, have decided to introduce the

same model into the complex and loaded relationships between Jews and Arabs within Israel. It was a time when the pattern of coexistence between the two ethnic communities, both of them citizens of Israel, has been threatened by a number of violent troubles. At the same time, the majority of population in both communities acknowledged the fact that they will have to live together, side by side in the same country, yet they don't have the proper tools to dialogue. Therefore, the Co- Existence Jewish-Arabic Project, intended to introduce the tools of Imago and the Communologue into both Jews and Arabs communities Israel to facilitate the connectivity between the communities, was established.

One of the main goals if this project was to introduce Imago for the first time into the Arab community of Israel, which forms 20% of the population, estimated in about 1.5 million people.

The members of the group committed themselves to an ongoing dialogue, and to the expansion of the tools of Imago and communologue within their communities. Another aim was to prepare educators in Imago work and Communologue to help spread communication and better understanding.

In addition to the Palestinian – Israel conflict, communologue was used to enhance connectivity between rival communities in Rwanda following the massacres of entire communities in this African country.

In 2005, a young Rwandan woman, Immaculee Ilibigiza, happened to meet Helen LaKelly Hunt at a workshop on empowering women. During that meeting Immaculee began to have an inkling of how Imago principles might be helpful with her countrymen, many of whom had had terrible experiences

in their country's period of genocide. Helen referred her to the Peace Project. Through discussions on the regular weekly Monday phone bridge, a plan was developed to follow up with Immaculee as the healing power of Communologue seemed to be able to play an important role in Rwanda. Four of the Peace Project members: Allan Schiffer, his wife Yvonne, Janet Hostetler and Donald Gibbon, taught Communologue to the Rwanda's delegation to the United Nations. A group went back to Rwanda to continue the work there. A few months later, the group came back and had more Communologue training from the Peace Project members.

A group of committed Imago therapists continued to develop the Peace Project by collecting and integrating experiences in many different countries (e.g. the USA, South Africa, Russia, Sweden, Denmark, Slovenia, Croatia, Austria ...), various groupings and institutions. At the Imago Congress in Vienna 2019 the Communologue was the touching closing. People from all over the world took part. The contents and experienced encounters of the Congress could reverberate and deepen even further.

We strive to walk our talk, to practice what we teach and to build bridges of connection and understanding in order to bring hope to places where there was none before.