



YES!

by Mostafa Ismail

The Middle East YES Jam!

A Personal Account

Founded in 1990 by two teenagers who had a vision for a better world and a more rational society that valued peace, acceptance and community, "YES! World" has had more than 100 weeklong gatherings called "YES! Jams" in 65+ nations, attracting young social change leaders from all around the world. Late last year, YES! Jam held an event in Wadi Rum, Jordan, which brought together participants from more than seven countries, inviting them to connect, and, through that connection, alter their perception of how they can work together to create a better world.

To understand the Middle East YES! Jam, it is useful to break it down: the word "yes" often means to agree or accept; it implies the willingness to discover and delve deep into an experience. The word Jam, on the other hand, can mean one of two things: it often means the coming together of diverse ingredients to produce something profound. It can be the coming together of musicians to co-create a piece of music, or it can mean the mashing up of fruits to create a mouth-watering condiment like jam.

That leaves us with Middle East, and, to keep it simple, this region has always had a profound significance in worldly affairs, whether political, spiritual, economic or geographic. Lately, the Middle East has become the focus of drastic change in many aspects, including the personal, interpersonal and systemic. This change has often taken the form of protests against regimes, inner revolutions, and new understandings of the meaning of community and society.

Grass roots' movements have also increased significantly, especially in the past few years, as young leaders and visionaries have mobilized to pour their hearts into creating a change that they want to see in their communities.

I recently attended one of YES! World's Jams in Wadi Rum Jordan. The Jam brought together young change leaders from Morocco, Egypt, Jordan, Palestine, Israel, Turkey and Iraq – and by young I mean not necessarily in age, but in spirit. Participants from Sudan and Pakistan who were scheduled to attend the event were unable to join us due to border issues.

"Coming to the jam, I thought that this was going to be an experience where we get together and talk about our lives and what change means; however, not only did that happen, but we also created a space for deep inquiry and honest self reflection. It gave me a chance to look at myself and others and to celebrate our differences and appreciate our similarities," said one participant who preferred not to be named.

At the jam, participants were invited to take off their day-to-day masks and get to the heart of the matter – a feat that requires a lot of courage for many people. Jammers are required to retain a certain confidentiality about the experience, and the motto "whatever happens at the jam stays at the jam," allows them to feel comfortable with the deep intimate sharing that occurs. From moments of tears triggered by sharing deep pain and trauma, to hysterical laughter found in the joys of connecting deeply, jammers left with the feeling that every jammer they met was not just family, but a strong pillar of support and light to everyone in the community.

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Over the course of one week, we discussed topics like active listening, empathy, support, awareness of reactions, identity, gender, sexuality, forgiveness, failure, truth, love, pain, the power of co-creating and how to create borderless communities.

While each person's journey was different, it was evident that the event created strong bonds between the jammers. By the end of the jam, everyone had shed limiting layers and barriers, and it felt as though we had a safe common space that allowed us to be transparent with one another. We built a network of trust, community, support, love and everlasting friendships.

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Jammers doing trust exercises at Wadi Rum in Jordan



We worked together to find the source of power within each and every one of us, and learned how to create change within our circles and communities. Even after I had left, I was still fueled by this experience to create a world of coexistence, equality, love, support, and to contribute to a global community of dreamers and doers.

“The jam opened up my perception to notice how I interact with the world around me. We had exercises and workshops that guided me in gaining awareness about how I react towards certain things that challenge me. I now know that the real work happens when I come out of my comfort zone and face things head-on with no fear, it is a process and I am working to make it my everyday reality,” added the participant.

On a personal level, The jam urged me to question how I conduct my daily life as well: What if we shed our daily masks and just jammed with everyone around us? What would our world look like, and how would we feel about our contributions to it? ▣

For more information, visit: www.yesworld.org

