

**JOURNEYS:  
A Report on MASAA-MASAAR in Summer 2008**

*A once-in-a-lifetime journey... in six days... together.*

Submitted 15 October 2008 by Dorit Shippin

Following the success of the Masaa-Masaar ("Journey" in Hebrew and Arabic) program for young people launched in the summer of 2007, we ran the program for the second time in the summer of 2008.

As before, this summer's goal was to provide an in-depth learning experience for a diverse group of young people – to learn about themselves and about their companions on the Journey. The focus was on their identity and their connection to the land in the context of two different historical narratives – the Jewish Israeli and the Palestinian. Participants were given historical information new to them, both about their own group and, especially, about the other. Between touring and workshop sessions, there was time to reflect on the learning process itself. Each day began with a quiet morning period of contemplation and ended with everyone together in an evening circle for shared reflection, enabling each participant to express their thoughts and feelings about the day just ended.

The workshops conducted in tandem with the travel component are described below. Note that the entire program was **bilingual**, conducted in Arabic and Hebrew. **The group** comprised 24 teenagers, aged 14 to 17: 10 boys and 14 girls, 10 Jews and 14 Arabs (Muslims and Christians). The **facilitators** were Vivienne Rabia' of Ramla and Ruti Shuster of Neve Shalom / Wahat al Salam. **Participants** hailed from various places: Ramla, Lod, Wahat al Salam / Neve Shalom, Kufr Kassem, Abu Ghosh, Jerusalem, Kibbutz Gezer, Sitriya and Kfar Harif.

**Day One: Wahat al Salam / Neve Shalom**

The journey began with a day of getting acquainted, here in the Jewish-Arab shared community of Neve Shalom / Wahat al Salam. Some youngsters came with friends, and others knew absolutely no one. Shyness and curiosity were both much in evidence.

Noam (Jewish, 21 years old), a college student from WAS/NS and a graduate of the village's educational system, talked with the group in Arabic and in Hebrew about life in a shared egalitarian community of Jews and Arabs. She asked them to guess whether she was an Arab or a Jew (they were not sure). Then there were more activities devoted to getting acquainted and clarifying expectations and hopes for the journey; some highlights:

"I want to make new friends, hoping it will be fun and interesting" (Jewish boy); "I want to learn about the religions" (another Jewish boy); "We want to make our voices heard, get rid of prejudice, stigmas, and stereotypes about Arabs and get to know the other side" (Arab girl); "Hoping for interesting arguments, breaking down walls, creating social ties" (Jewish girl); "To have solidarity in our group, with everyone expressing themselves openly" (an Arab girl); "To have fun, enjoy ourselves, and never forget this journey" (another Arab girl).

At the end of this first day, we spent the evening around a campfire and each participant brought something representing their culture, and talked about it.

### **Day Two – Jerusalem**

The second day began at Wahat al Salam / Neve Shalom with a circle of quiet contemplation – the first such experience for all these youngsters. Some had a hard time sitting still and keeping quiet. In planning the Journey, we saw this component as significant: a way to give the group and each individual an experience of inward and outward journeying, simultaneously. Gradually, we watched the morning's quiet contemplation become a natural part of the daily activities.

### **Meeting and tour with Sister Carmela Farrugia: Jerusalem and Christianity.**

Sister Carmela Farrugia of the Order of the Sisters of Zion has lived in Jerusalem for 40 years. She met Father Bruno Hussar, founder of Neve Shalom, at the Ecce Homo Monastery in 1967. Later, in 2006 at the dedication ceremony for the Pluralistic Spiritual Centre at Neve Shalom (named for Father Bruno), Sister Carmela said that "Bruno [always] talked about his wish to promote reconciliation between Arabs and Jews... Today, 40 years later... here at Neve Shalom... I am continuing [that] work."

Now, Sister Carmela spoke to our group about her Jerusalem, stressing her love for its residents from the three faiths. Accompanying us to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, standing on its steps, she recounted briefly the story of the life of Jesus of Nazareth. Members of the group listened with interest. The Jewish and Muslim youngsters learned something new: for instance, that Jesus was in fact a Jew, and that his Hebrew name was Yeshua (whereas Yeshu – Jesus - was once considered pejorative). There were many "firsts":

"I was very moved to see the grave of Yeshua and the believers around it who were crying... I have never been inside a church; this is my first time (a Muslim Arab girl); "I am often in Jerusalem but this is my first time I a church" (a Muslim boy); "I learned a lot about Christianity and that was something new for me; I never had a chance to learn about Christianity before..." (a Jewish boy).

After walking along the Via Dolorosa, we came to Ecce Homo Convent, where Carmela serves and where she first met Father Bruno. There, against the spectacular backdrop of the Old City of Jerusalem, we took a group photo.

### **Meeting and tour with Rabbi Arik Asherman – Jerusalem and Judaism.**

In the afternoon, we had an appointment to meet with Rabbi Arik Asherman, director of Rabbis for Human Rights (Israel) and a resident of Jerusalem, at the Western Wall. Rabbis for Human Rights <http://rhr.israel.net/> is the only organization in Israel today speaking out, in the name of Jewish tradition, about human rights. A non-partisan, non-political organization founded in 1988, RHR-Israel today has about 100 members, all ordained rabbis and rabbinical students. RHR is the only rabbinical organization in Israel in which rabbis from all major streams of Judaism work together – representing the Orthodox, Reform, Conservative, Reconstructionist and Jewish Renewal movements.

Rabbi Asherman briefly recounted the history of the Western Wall site and talked to the group about his love for Israel and Jerusalem. He confused the participants a bit by speaking Hebrew, and sometimes Arabic, with an American accent. "When I first saw

Rabbi Arik," one participant said later, "I thought he was just like all the others... Then I listened to him, and I liked how he talked about the rights of the Palestinians, and I changed my mind" (an Arab girl).

While we were listening to Rabbi Asherman, we saw and heard groups of soldiers swearing their oath of service at the Western Wall. The Arab participants were amazed at the conflation of the military ritual with a holy place; Rabbi Arik explained that Judaism, historically, makes a connection between religion, nationality, and army.

Before leaving, the staff suggested that anyone wishing to do so approach the Wall as a place of prayer: girls and boys separately. Being together at that place, as Arabs and Jews, was particularly moving; at the same time, there were also feelings of alienation and not belonging on the part of Arab participants. Here are some responses:

"Before today I only saw the [Western] Wall on television, and suddenly to be near to these sacred stones... I almost cried..." (an Arab girl); "It was moving for me to be at the Wall; I learned a lot about a different religion, Judaism, and I didn't know a lot about it before" (another Arab girl); "When we were at the Wall, I noticed that people were looking at us strangely, and I was embarrassed that we weren't like them [like the religious Jews there]..." (an Arab boy); "I haven't laid tefillin [put on phylacteries, for prayer] since my Bar Mitzvah, and at the Wall I did, and it really moved me" (a Jewish boy); "I felt bad when we came to the Wall and everyone was looking at me as if I was going to blow up..." (an Arab boy); "I learned a lot about Judaism, it was new to me, and I found it moving to see the Wall" (another Arab boy).

The rest of Rabbi Asherman's tour addressed his work and that of RHR-Israel concerning violations of Palestinians' rights in Jerusalem. We went on foot with Rabbi Arik to the village of Silwan. We sat in the protest tent set up there by local activists attempting to protect the rights of Silwan's residents. We learned about systematic harassment of residents by the Elad organization and its attempts to take over houses in the village, and about targeted discrimination against residents by the establishment. Rabbi Arik and RHR support the struggle in Silwan, and have even gone to jail for their attempts to oppose the razing of houses in the village. Representatives of the residents welcomed us warmly and explained about their struggle and why they chose the path of nonviolent protest to advance their aims and prevent attempts to take over their village. This warm welcome by the residents of Silwan is not self-evident; they have chosen, not merely to counter discrimination and harassment with nonviolence, but also to actively welcome the cooperation of Jewish citizens in their struggle. Here is how the young people responded:

"In Silwan, it was hard for me to see how they have negated the rights of the residents and I was ashamed that we were eating popsicles while they were talking about how their right to exist is being violated..." (an Arab girl); "... It hurt me that we are not aware of what they are going through" (another Arab girl); "It was hard for me when we sat in the protest tent with Jews and Arabs sitting separately" (another Arab girl); "In Silwan I felt a lot of anger and I thought about what I would do if someone tried to evict me from my home in Lod..." (an Arab boy); "Suddenly I understood how hard the situation is in East Jerusalem, how people have to fight to keep their houses" (a Jewish boy); "Although I am in Jerusalem a lot, I was surprised to learn that someone living 100 meters from

there is living like the Jews who they tried to expel from Egypt. It's hard to understand that the Palestinians can't do a whole lot, and it's happening so close to us. To know that they are not using violence in their struggle, they could have done that, that would have been easy, but they chose the harder way – talking" (a Jewish boy); "I think they need to unite and fight for their land" (a Muslim boy).

To learn more about the struggle in Silwan: <http://www.alt-arch.org/index.html>

### **Day Three: Meeting with Sheikh Ghassan Manasra: Jerusalem and Islam.**

On the morning of the third day, we met with Sheikh Ghassan Manasra, a Muslim clergyman and resident of Jerusalem, who took us to the Dome of the Rock mosque. There was a great deal of excitement and tension as we came to the Al Aqsa plaza (the Temple Mount) via the Dung Gate (Bab al-Maghariba). We were greeted by a representative of one of the Muslim groups responsible for the plaza. We were warmly received and we listened to a detailed explanation about the place. Members of the group, particularly the Jews, were somewhat nervous. All the girls had their heads covered and there was a special atmosphere while this man was hosting, perhaps for the first time, a mixed group at the site. As we walked on and the beautiful mosque came into view, we were all amazed. All the non-Muslim youngsters were seeing Al-Aksa mosque for the first time. The adults remembered the Dome of the Rock from their childhood and youth in the 1970s, when access to the site was fairly free for everyone. Ideally, we would all have been able to enter the Dome of the Rock mosque, with its special spiritual significance to Muslims all over the world. Alas, not everyone was admitted, and some were angry when the guard denied entry to women in pants or other clothing deemed inappropriate, irrespective of their religion. Our host explained that the guard belongs to an especially conservative group.

During our tour, we heard about the history and the values of Islam, which was enriching for all the participants, who were curious and listened quietly to the guide's talk. The meeting with the Muslim clergyman and the visit to Al Aksa were very significant for the Jewish participants, who had approached it with some trepidation. Today, unfortunately, Islam is often associated with extremism and violence, and among the Arab participants as well, there was clearly a desire that this trip provide an opportunity to change this impression. The Muslims especially regretted that some youngsters were denied entry. Here are some comments from the shared circle on that same evening:

"I really, really want to thank Amira and Manaar [Muslim girls in the group] for showing [us] the mosque and explaining everything..." (a Christian Arab girl); "It was hard for me because I wanted the Jewish kids to go into the Al Aqsa mosque and it was too bad that they could not get in... The guard at the entrance was really vulgar. Meantime, when I went inside the mosque with Jessica and explained everything to her and I touched the rock – I felt really happy" (a Muslim Arab girl); "There are rules that anyone who is not pure cannot go into the mosque. The Jews and the Christians do not acknowledge these rules, so they could not go inside, because it would harm the sacredness of the place. But that doesn't justify the behavior of the guard" (another Muslim Arab girl); "It was unifying to go to Al Aqsa together, we felt united..." (a Muslim Arab girl).

"It was something new for me to go into the mosque and see all the amazing forms there... I learned something new; I learned that the Arabs want to hear us more. Meanwhile, we are not talking that much; and I hope that the Arabs in the

group understand that we have good intentions, even if they were not stated..." (a Jewish girl); "At the mosque, I liked hearing the positive sides about the Arabs that I did not know; it was nice to see the buildings all around and the beautiful courtyard..." (a Jewish boy).

#### The language of photographs

On the afternoon of that same day, we held a *photolongage* workshop to process some of these experiences. Scattered on the floor were black and white photographs portraying various situations involving people, nature, or wilderness. The participants were asked to walk around and look at the photographs, and to choose one or two that portrayed their feelings and thoughts about Jewish-Arab relations. Then they went around the circle, with each participant presenting their photographs to the group, along with the reasons for their choice. The subjects that came up via the choices the Arab youngsters had made revolved around oppression, discrimination, and racism they have encountered, and the troubles of the Palestinians under occupation. The Jews focused more on personal issues. Some of the responses:

"I had a really hard time when Manaar cried during the photolongage. I wanted to cry but I was embarrassed. I learned a lot of things from her that I did not know, about what they are doing to the Arabs" (a Jewish girl); "About the photolongage: this brought out a lot of my pain and I did not know how to control my feelings" (an Arab girl); "I liked the photolongage. It was a special opportunity. Everyone was connected, everyone was able to find something, to bring something of themselves and explain it with the photo so that others could understand them..." (a Jewish girl); "It was hard for me to sit in a workshop for so many hours..." (a Jewish boy).

#### Later, we held separate sessions for the Jewish and the Arab participants:

**In the Arab group**, the youngsters talked about the connection, the strong bond, between them. They felt that they had known one another for a long time. They discussed things that they had felt uncomfortable about raising in front of the other group, and expressed disappointment that the Jewish group was not responsive enough and that there was no one with whom to argue.

**In the Jewish group**, they talked about the discriminatory attitude toward Arabs; youngsters who live on a kibbutz described, by way of example, how the kibbutz had refused to grant membership to the Arab boyfriend of one of the women members of the kibbutz, and they even talked about discrimination against Mizrahi ("Oriental") Jews. They argued hotly about the attitude toward Arabs in Israeli society and about the critique that some of them have regarding the Arabs ("They don't take responsibility for their environment, and that's why there is negligence and dirt"; "All they can do is make demands on the State, but they aren't prepared to give"; etc.). Clearly they felt freer to express themselves in the absence of the Arabs.

#### About spirituality

In preparation for the Journey, we held a short workshop for the staff on the subject of spiritual identity. We wanted to spend more time on religious and cultural identity and direct the participants' attention to the spiritual dimension that exists within them and in

the world. We thought that broadening the concept of religion for them could help all the youngsters, including those who are uncertain of their attitude to religion, to find their place on the question of identity.

On the floor, we spread about 30 paper squares with various concepts written on them: makeup [cosmetics], computer, love, power, money, car, etc. The squares were placed upside down. Participants were asked, one at a time, to choose a square and to give their opinion as to whether the concept written there was spiritual or material / not spiritual. They had the option of talking it over with the group and deciding together.

We then had a discussion designed to address aspects of the question of what spirituality is. Is ours a society that invests time and thought in these matters? Do we accept our way of life as self-evident? We sketched a chart on the board and recorded the decisions.

The discussion was lively and fruitful. The responses were fascinating and very special. We were surprised by the high level of thought and the degree of interest and attention on the part of participants. In our preparatory workshop, we had thought that a session like this could answer a lot of questions about life and human existence – the kinds of questions that preoccupy adolescents. Who can do better than teenagers, who have yet to enter the reigning paradigm, at offering insights and raising fascinating, fundamental questions about life?

One of the outstanding conclusions of this discussion was that money can be something spiritual. Likewise, when the word makeup (cosmetics) was mentioned, the group concluded that makeup can express the aspiration to beauty, and that beauty is a spiritual concept.

This was the first time that these facilitators had conducted such a workshop. One of them said: "I loved the workshop on spirituality; I was surprised at myself..."

#### **Day Four: Jaffa**

For this journey, Jaffa was chosen to exemplify a mixed city that had been an Arab city prior to 1948. En route, most of the kids fell asleep on the bus. Arriving at Beit Daniel, a beautiful new youth hostel, we noticed that the inscription on the building appeared in Arabic as well as in Hebrew and that the building itself was made of traditional stone. We concluded that the planning had been sensitive to the location in the heart of Jaffa, where most of the residents are Arabs.

Having stowed their things in their rooms, the group boarded the bus again and went on to Jaffa port for a boat ride. The spectacular view of the blue sea, with Jaffa's picturesque houses in the background, brought everyone fully awake. Someone took out a darbouka (small drum). The Arabs were sitting here, the Jews sitting there, separately. The Arabs were united, happy, singing songs and laughing. The Jews were sitting quietly and seemed a little sad. We tried to get the Jewish youngsters to join in the singing, in vain. We switched to Mizrahi music but we were still unable to get them to dance or sing.

#### **A tour of Jaffa, the "bride of the sea," and a meeting with Abed Satel, a volunteer with the Committee for the Arabs of Jaffa.**

We wanted to give the participants a glimpse at the lesser-known side of Tel Aviv-Jaffa.

The afternoon was very hot and humid. The tour was long and detailed, and included the long-ago history of Jaffa from the time of Napoleon and the history of the last hundred years via the Nakba events of 1948. The story of Jaffa was recalled in the personal images and stories of Abed Satel, retold in a manner full of pain and also full of love for the city. Fascinated, we heard about a city with a rich cultural and artistic past, a lively social life and a developed economy – all this, until the conquest of the city by the Jews in 1948 and the expulsion of most of its inhabitants.

Jaffa is known as "the bride of the sea" because of its location on a hill above the Mediterranean. After April 1948, Jaffa was left a ghost town. Ninety-five percent of its residents were expelled or fled the city, either to Arab countries or to the West Bank and Gaza. Of its 120,000 residents, only about 3,800 remained; these were moved to the Ajami neighborhood and placed under military law for several years. Even now, the neighborhood still suffers from the effects of continuing neglect, discrimination, disinheritance and want. From comments at the sharing circle that night:

"I liked the boat ride. I liked the tour of Jaffa, the buildings and the Old City, and the descriptive explanations given by the guide. I learned a lot of things I didn't know before... I was sure that Jaffa was an ordinary city" (a Jewish girl); "I did not know that there was such a large cinema in Jaffa. It hurt me to see the razed buildings" (an Arab girl); "It was fun to go on the boat ride, but I was sorry that there were no songs in Hebrew so we could sing too..." (a Jewish girl); "I learned, from the guide Abed, that you have to respect a person even if he is working as a cleaner..." (an Arab boy); "I liked the boat ride the best; too bad it was so short" (a Jewish boy); "I learned that Jaffa is one of the oldest cities in the world..." (a Jewish girl); "It was hot! hot! hot!"... (everyone).

#### **Day Five: Traveling north: an encounter with collective memory.**

The remaining days of the Journey were devoted to the matter of both peoples' historical memory. Ruti, one of our facilitators, shared her thoughts on the journey north...: "It was a long trip to the north; the kids were sleeping... we were rather tired ourselves. I was busy thinking about the connection between the Nakba and the Holocaust. How can this connection be ignored...? Is that even possible, given that the Holocaust is such a deeply rooted narrative in the Jewish-Israeli experience...? Can we deal with the subject without connecting it with the founding of the state and the Palestinian Nakba?"

#### **A visit to Kibbutz Lohamei Haghetat: humanistic education workshop.**

The Center for Humanistic Education has been operating at Kibbutz Lohamei Haghetat since 1995, bringing together teachers and students from all the groups – Jewish and Arab – that are part of Israeli society. <http://www.gfh.org.il/eng/>

We began with a tour of the Yad LeYeled Children's Museum, which recounts the story of the Holocaust from the standpoint of children. The group listened especially attentively to the unusual story of Janusz Korczak.

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Janusz\\_Korczak](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Janusz_Korczak)

After the tour, we sat in a circle for an exercise about on the value and importance of remembering. The participants were asked to discuss the idea of individual and collective memory and draw conclusions about the influence of memory on the future. The workshop encouraged the youngsters to acknowledge and honor the collective memory of the group to which they belong and, in the same measure, to acknowledge

and honor the collective memory of the other group. This activity attempts to help young people understand how learning about the past is important for the future. It also stresses the need to take responsibility, now, for the future – regarding, for example, social justice and education to eradicate racism.

**A visit to the ruins of the villages of Al Ghabsiyya and Al Bassa, and an encounter with Daoud Bader, who was born in Ghabsiyye and is an activist with the Association for the Defense of the Rights of Internally Displaced Palestinians.**

After lunch, we went to meet with Daoud Bader. The meeting began at Ghabsiyya, with Daoud's own story. In 1948, he was a boy of ten when his family was expelled from their home to a nearby village. They have never been permitted to return to their land. Their village was razed by the army in the 1950s. We saw the remnants of the village, the mosque, the spring, and some fruit trees.

From there, we went on to Al Bassa, once a large village with 3,000 residents, a third of whom were Christians and two-thirds Muslims. Al Bassa is very close to the border with Lebanon; the town of Shlomi was built on its lands. We saw remnants of churches, and a mosque behind a fence. Daoud described the vibrant mixed community that lived in the village. In 1948, the village was conquered and all its inhabitants were expelled or fled to Lebanon. Some of the residents found their way back into Israel and settled in other villages, but most were obliged to remain in the refugee camps in Lebanon.

In his parting comments, Daoud said he was encouraged by the presence of young Arabs and Jews together. He said it gave him hope for a better, shared future. In the sharing circle that evening, the youngsters talked about how painful and weighty the day's experiences had been. At this stage of the Journey, there was already a lot of group cohesion. From the statements they shared, one could see that enough trust had been established that they were able to open up about their sadness and their fears. Clearly they had learned about chapters in history to which they had not previously been exposed, or at least not in a way that gave them such direct contact and in-depth understanding.

We can assume that the Arab youngsters had already learned about the Jewish Holocaust, but from their statements, we see that this encounter genuinely touched their hearts. Later, some of the Arab participants learned more about their own painful history and this learning was meaningful to them. Jewish participants expressed the pain they felt about what they learned about Palestinian history. A few of the statements from the circle that night:

"Daoud's story about what happened to him as a child touched me very deeply. It was hard to hear that he has no connection with his sisters and that they have been turned into refugees" (a Jewish boy); "It was important for me to hear about the history of my people, about what happened in 1948 and also about the massacre in Kufr Qassem" (an Arab girl); "It was hard for me to see the ruins of Al Bassa" (an Arab boy).

"It was very hard for me to hear that Daoud lives a long way from his sisters and his family. I did not know much about what happened to Palestinians in 1948, and this was new and moving" (an Arab girl); "Everything Daoud talked about was new to me. We never learned about this and I did not know about the suffering of the Palestinians" (another Arab girl).



"It was very sad to see the shoes of children killed in the Holocaust. I felt that architecture has a message and they did not just build the building that way by chance" (an Arab girl); "In the tour of Arab villages, it was hard for me to concentrate after we went to the Holocaust museum... I felt like I was tired and had no patience..." (a Jewish boy); "It was hard for me to hear about what happened to the Jews in the Holocaust. I never heard about it this way" (an Arab boy); "I was surprised that children in camps were optimistic and painted happy pictures..." (an Arab girl); "It was scary to walk around the museum" (an Arab boy).

"It was difficult seeing that they put the mezuzah in a diaper to humiliate the Jews. This is what they are doing to us today, taking symbols of religion and using them to humiliate. That's what they did in Guantanamo to the Qur'an when they stepped on it. I was very moved by the story of Korczak, who was loyal to the children [of his orphanage] to the end, and went willingly to his death" (an Arab girl); "It was good that we went to places in Palestine that we did not know and that we went to the Holocaust museum and got to know the history and injustice done to the Jews..." (another Arab girl); "I was very sad at the museum. It was too bad that there were children who made noise and disturbed [people]" (a Jewish girl).

"It was hard at the museum because we Jews are too sensitive about the issue of the Holocaust" (a Jewish girl); "I didn't like the museum; things were over-decorated. I didn't like having the real voices of children in the background; I couldn't connect with it; I did not understand why this was necessary. In the workshop, I felt that the division into negative and positive was organizing my head and my thoughts" (another Jewish girl).

#### **Day Six: Wrapping up, and concluding activities.**

The concluding session was, fittingly, a farewell session. Statements by the participants suggest that they underwent a meaningful experience. Nearly all the youngsters mentioned "firsts": They said it was their first visit to holy places in Jerusalem, or their first visit to such places as part of a mixed Jewish-Arab group. Muslims entered a mosque with Christian friends for the first time; all the Arabs were visiting the Western Wall for the first time. It was the first time the Arab youngsters met a Jew wearing a kippah who defends Palestinians and, in the name of his faith, struggles for justice for all. It was the first time the Arab participants heard about the Holocaust from the perspective of the suffering of children, and the first time the Jewish participants had shared this pain with Arabs. And so on and so forth.

The Arabs in the group were older and hence more able to express themselves and were expecting more self-disclosure from the Jews. The Jewish participants were surprised by how articulate the Arabs were and by their joie de vivre. One of the participants noted that the encounter itself was the most interesting part.

Here are two sets of quotes from a Jewish girl and an Arab girl in the group:

**Jewish girl:** It was hard to get up early every morning. We were in all kinds of special situations with the Arabs, and that was a chance to see how they really are. I understand that they are like us; they want contact and we really were able

to make contact despite the distancing between the two groups. **We spent a week as if on another planet, like in a greenhouse. Every one of you is smart, amazing and beautiful.**

**Arab girl:** In the Holocaust museum, I identified strongly with the terrible things that happened to the Jewish people. It was written beautifully there: "**Our love was like the wind, we did not see it but we felt it. The hatred passes, but the love always remains.**" And I say: even though there are conflicts between our peoples, they will pass – and the love between people will always remain.

One of the chaperones told the members of the group, "As you were together on this Journey – that is how the world should be." Thus ended the Journey; the journey of life goes on. We hope that each of the participants will take this experience with them, back to their lives, with respect and appreciation for those who are different from them and with respect and appreciation for themselves; and we hope that they will want to work toward a more beautiful and more just world.

**Appended: Reports from the two facilitators, Vivian Rabia' and Ruti Shuster**

## **Appendix to the Report on Masaa-Masaar 2008: Impressions and feedback from the facilitators**

### **By Ruti Shuster (the Jewish facilitator):**

I am contemplating the week of the Journey with an inclusive view that ties together all the components. Our objectives included: Deepening each participant's knowledge of him/herself and their affiliation group; creating a protected, enabling environment where participants can express themselves and participate in the group, without being judged; fostering a group that can expose itself to conflicts and cope with them, and also take responsibility for disseminating a message that Jews and Arabs in this country can live a shared, egalitarian life despite the difficulties and the painful history.

To achieve the objectives we had set, we conveyed a message of shared facilitation, with the fullest presence of both languages, despite the asymmetry in the Jewish group's lack of knowledge of Arabic. We brought out the story that is generally not told – of the Palestinian narrative and the Nakba. We exposed the group to a positive experience of the three religions and to various realities of life in mixed communities in this country.

The Journey began with getting to know Neve Shalom / Wahat al Salam (since many participants were from outside the village): becoming familiar with an unusual way of life that embodies a strong message of equality and partnership between two peoples in conflict. The question arose as to whether this is "coexistence"? Is this the model that we are taking with us on this Journey? In my opinion, this question echoed and re-echoed throughout the course of the Journey.

The exposure to the three religions was an unparalleled and powerful experience for everyone, via visual and experiential contemplation and the chance to become acquainted personally with representatives of the three faiths. The encounter was with believers of each of the faiths respectively, but they are people for whom adherents of the other faiths and members of the other people are valued and honoured, not just verbally or in a declarative way but through actions, sometimes exacting a high personal price. (Rabbi Asherman, for example, has been jailed for defending the rights of Palestinians in Jerusalem). During this part of the Journey, our group was exposed to a wealth of knowledge and tradition of which they had previously been unaware or about which they had even harboured a certain prejudice (that religion equals extremism or fundamentalism).

The activity involving the narratives, the encounter with the depopulated villages in the Galilee and with the personal story of Daoud Bader, the activity involving the memory of the Holocaust at Lohamei Haghetaot, all left a very strong impression. Participants were overwhelmed with feelings and thoughts about the conflict and the painful history of both peoples. Many of the participants were exposed to the story of the Nakba in a direct manner for the very first time. In the activity at Lohamei Haghetaot, I expected to raise the question of how to cope with the trauma of an entire people. What is done with the memory of the Holocaust? What is the lesson? Why and how did it happen? I expected the activity would lead to a discussion of subjects like humanism, racism, xenophobia, etc. This expectation rested on the activities of the Journey taken last year, but this time it did not happen. What happened instead was that the identity of the Jewish participants was strengthened and there was a recognition and an identification by the Arab participants that the Jewish people had undergone a terrible event. For many of the

participants, this was the first visit to a Holocaust museum and their first time hearing the story from the point of view of the victim.

During the tour of Jaffa, one comment by a young participant led to the guide's posing a question to the group. The participant asked whether residents of Jaffa are living together like the people at Neve Shalom / Wahat al Salam, and the guide answered that there is a difference between **coexistence** and a **shared existence**, and asked what they thought the difference was. The difference between coexistence and shared existence has to do with the principle of equality. In Jaffa, as in many other places in this country, there is coexistence by coercion, wherein the Arab minority generally endures a humiliating and racist attitude, whereas in the community of Wahat al Salam / Neve Shalom, the shared existence is a conscious choice and based on mutual respect and equality.

Throughout the Journey, there was generally a balanced flow of experiences that were highly emotional, others that were lighter and more entertaining, and workshops designed to process the experiences. The latter demanded serious attention, concentration, and openness on the part of the participants.

The encounter would not have been as complete, nor as deep, had the participants not touched on the more difficult and conflict-related subjects. I was surprised at how well these youngsters were able, on the one hand, to talk very candidly about painful questions, about racism and discrimination, about pain and sorrow – and on the other hand to sustain their unity as a group. Throughout the entire Journey, their coherence as a strong group with mutual bonding and mutual responsibility was very evident. They were respectful, open and attentive to one another. There was a strong group voice, and at the same time the group created a safe, supportive space in which participants could speak out.

To conclude, and to close the circle, one could say that if the criteria of success were to create an authentic and in-depth encounter, with openness on the part of the participants, raising subjects to which they are ordinarily not exposed, dealing bravely with difficulties by using the strength of the group that developed, then certainly there is a sense of success. I would like to note especially the shared facilitation, with each facilitator speaking her own language (and the Arab facilitator also serving as translator), and each participant speaking in their own language. This was a direct continuation of the message conveyed to the group in their visit to Wahat al Salam / Neve Shalom and throughout the entire Journey – a message based on an egalitarian encounter, a worldview that includes all aspects of the differing identities of the participants, grounded in respect for self and for those who are different than ourselves, and on accepting difference, however hard that may be.

**By Vivian Rabia' (the Arab facilitator):**

The intent of this program is to take the participants on an inward and outward Journey: to enable them to encounter places and people that expose them to unfamiliar aspects of history and of reality, from the standpoint of the relations between Arabs and Jews in Israel.

In our reality here in this country, young people are not exposed to experiences or to information of the kind they received during this Journey – not at home, and not within

the state educational system. The latter offers them only very partial information (in the Arab schools), or else information wholly from a Jewish, Israeli, Zionist perspective (in the case of the Jewish schools). The official texts used in the Arabs schools never mention the Nakba.

What is special about this program is the intensity of the experience. Even for me, as a Palestinian working in the encounter field for many years, this was an emotional experience – both during the Journey this summer and last year's, in 2007, as well. I particularly remember looking out over the Old City of Jerusalem from the roof of the Ecce Homo monastery, inwardly full of impressions of the meeting with the nun and peace activist Sister Carmela; of Sheikh Ghassan Manasra talking about Islam against the backdrop of the Dome of the Rock; and of Rabbi Arik Asherman who, after our visit to the Western Wall, took us to Silwan. Silwan made me feel what the residents of Jerusalem are going through, native Jerusalemites these many generations, living in fear of losing homes and the city of their birth. I thought about the impossible complexity of the Palestinian Arab identity in Jerusalem. I was very moved by the testimony of Rabbi Asherman and the integration of Jewish faith and human rights – everyone's human rights.

The Journey had a very significant impact on the group. The Palestinian participants undoubtedly underwent a process of empowerment. Perhaps they had heard the story of the Nakba at home but, for most of them, it was in a much less direct and personal way, compared with hearing it from Daoud Bader of the Committee of the Displaced.

Moments I particularly remember include these two, especially: A Palestinian boy in the group was very moved by Daoud Bader's story of not seeing his family living in Lebanon; a Christian girl felt very moved that her Muslim friend took care to see that she could go into the mosque, despite the problems in admitting her, and took her by the hand and showed her things and explained everything. --Generally there is a certain distancing and wariness between Christians and Muslims in Palestinian society. Instead, at these moments, there was something respectful and close.

The visit to the church was also a first for the Muslim participants. Here, too, it was very meaningful in terms of the bond within the group. Meantime, some Arab participants were frustrated, feeling that there had not been strong enough opposition, and that it was hard for them to express the anger they naturally felt [about discrimination and injustice], when dealing with such a sensitive, empathic and shy Jewish group. One Arab girl said that in another encounter group she was in, there were "real Jews" -- meaning, evidently, the kind you meet on the Israeli street or in the media.

The group as a whole was outstanding, in my opinion, in its understanding and ability to contain pain and intense emotion. This had to do with the composition of the group and the prior experience of some members with Arab-Jewish encounter.

Regarding the continuation of this program: During activities with this group in the coming year, I would like to focus in a more in-depth way on the issues that emerged during the Journey, to continue processing the experiences and to encourage the participants to feel responsible and to move in the direction of action that makes a contribution to society.