



Massa~Massar (the Journey / the path)

An interfaith learning and peace building program
for Jewish, Christian and Muslim youth in Israel.

**A GNRC regional initiative summer 2007,
designed, planned and implemented jointly by the [Pluralistic Spiritual Centre](#)
of Neve Shalom ~ Wahat al-Salam and the [Open House](#), Ramle**

Background

The [Global Network Of Religions For Children](#) (GNRC), is a worldwide network of religious organizations and people of faith who are united by an urgent concern for the well-being of children everywhere. GNRC members come from all of the world's major religions and many other spiritual traditions. They share a common commitment to making the world a place where every child can enjoy not only the right to survive, but also to thrive, making positive contributions of his or her own to a world of peace and dignity for all. The GNRC was inaugurated in May 2000 by the [Arigatou Foundation](#), an NGO in special consultative status with ECOSOC of the United Nations, and the Foundation continues to support its work today. A diverse group of [GNRC coordinators](#) facilitates the ongoing development of the GNRC in six major world regions. They work together with the GNRC members of their regions -- children, young people and adults -- to ensure that GNRC initiatives directly address the most difficult challenges that children face in each location. GNRC members share a set of common priorities in their worldwide work for children. Their initiatives and programs are often designed to integrate more than one of these key themes, which are: poverty eradication, child rights, ethics education, peace education, reducing urban violence, and empowering children and young people.

In the planning stage we used the first draft of the “[Toolkit for Ethics Education Through Interfaith learning](#)” as an inspiration for the program.

Our idea was to invite a group of young Jewish, Christian and Muslim Israeli citizens, aged 15 - 17 to a journey of discovery both into their own national, religious and spiritual identity and the identity of other groups sharing this land.

Inspired by the [Ethics Education initiative of the GNRC](#), we wanted to create a program that would promote the values of **Respect** for differences and similarities and **Empathy** for injustice. We would deal with conflict in the spirit of **reconciliation** and encourage the participants to take **responsibility** for creating a better, more just and more peaceful future for all of us in the region.

The program's working team consisted of six people. Dorit Shippin, Abedessalam Najjar, and Dalia Landau, organized technical details of the journey, helped to prepare the program and supervised it. Vivian Rabia and Rotem Mor were the facilitators of the journey itself. They were responsible for preparing the schedule and the activities, and recruited the young people. Lastly, Amit Kitain accompanied us on the journey and was responsible for first aid.

Before the Journey, Vivian (from a Palestinian Christian background) and Rotem (from a Jewish background), participated in the [training workshop](#) of the “Toolkit for Ethics Education Through Interfaith learning” that was initiated by the [Ethics Education for Children initiative](#) and took place in New Delhi, India in April 2007.

The Journey

General description

Between July 22-27, 2007, 22 young Israelis (ages 15-17) embarked on a six-day journey through Israel/Palestine. Among the young people there were both Jewish and Palestinian (Christian and Muslim) citizens of Israel, as well as one Israeli born Norwegian girl. The young people came from all over the country. By gender, the group had nine male participants (all Palestinian) and 13 female participants (nine of them Jewish and four of them Palestinian). Among the Palestinians there were three Christians and ten Muslims.

The program was constructed in order to provide young Jewish and Palestinian youth a chance to meet with one another and get more deeply in touch with their national and religious identity as well as get to know the other's national and religious identity. For this we prepared activities which provided joint learning and dialogue experiences as well as a chance to get to know each other on a personal level, while having a lot of fun in doing so. Much of the program was designed around very special interaction with interesting and important people and places as well as spaces for sharing and introspection.

Exploring the land: Israel/Palestine

The idea of making a journey around the country came from the fact that the land of Israel/ Palestine stands at the center of a conflict, since we have not learned yet to share it in a just and peaceful way.

Both Jews and Palestinians have stories to tell that are connected to their histories and religions. We wanted the group to experience some of these stories, as told by Jews and Palestinians of various religious backgrounds.

Our journey started in the old coastal town of Jaffa. We then spent two days in the northern part of the country, and finally spent two and a half days in Jerusalem (Yerushalayim / Al-Quds).

Using two languages - Arabic and Hebrew

From the beginning, the idea was to make the whole program bilingual. The participants would speak in their mother tongues, Arabic and Hebrew (both official languages of Israel). All of the participants understood Hebrew. Some of the Palestinian participants and Vivian, the facilitator, were fluently bilingual, while others among the Palestinian participants understood Hebrew but were shy to speak it. None of the Jewish participants could speak or understand Arabic. In Israel's segregated school system, Arabic is rarely taught to Jewish students in a way that enables them to properly acquire the language.) Therefore, in order to enable the participants to express themselves freely in their own language, we decided that Vivian would translate during the study tours and group sessions.

The narratives

In our conflicted land there are two parallel narratives that rarely meet. Sometimes they are not even told. The Jewish narrative of the national and religious connection to the land and the painful narrative of exile, persecution and genocide of the Jewish people is being told to every Jew around the world and to every Israeli since early childhood. In the same way, through the Ministry of Education, this story is also being taught from a nationalist Zionist perspective even in Israel's Arab schools.

The recent history and the story of the establishment of the state of Israel are naturally being told from the perspective of the Jewish side.

The Palestinian narrative of national and religious connection to the land and the painful story of the "Nakba" (the catastrophe) is a story that is rarely even today being told openly and is missing in both the Hebrew and Arabic text books in Israel.¹ We learned that the second generation (since the Nakba) did not hear so much from the first, and that only the third generation had started to raise the issue and talk about the injustice.

Religions and spirituality

Finding peace within

Every morning we began with ten minutes of silent meditation. During this time, we would be quiet and the participants would observe their breathing and try to keep themselves concentrated on this simple (but not so easy to perform) task. This activity was meant to give us a fresh start to our new day, and to allow our participants a simple spiritual practice which they could take home with them.

Visits of holy sites in Jerusalem:

During our Journey we visited and experienced some of the holiest places for the three religions. Each participant had a chance to experience a worship site of the other two religions and learn about the history of each of the monotheistic religions in Jerusalem.

Sharing thoughts and feelings: The evening circle

We concluded each evening during our journey with a circle in which every participant had a chance to share about how her or his day went. We did this one by one, with each participant receiving something sweet, like a candy, after which they would share something good that happened that day. After that they would be given a rock, which they would hold in their hand while sharing something hard about the day. Each participant finished by sharing something new that they had learned that day. During this time of sharing, the facilitators could learn about the impressions of each and every one of the members of the group for that day. This was a good tool for the facilitators to learn about the process.



The Group

Day by day impressions and experiences

Day 1 Getting to know each other in the old town of Jaffa

After much preparation and anticipation, our journey finally began with an early bus ride, during which we collected the participants, either from their home towns or from convenient meeting points. This part of our journey didn't last very long, only half an hour or so (since this is such a small country), but it was wonderful to finally meet everyone and we were all very excited to be together.

On our arrival to Jaffa we settled down in our neat little hostel and went straight to work. Our first step in the order of business was to get everyone familiar with one another. For this, we played ice-breaking games until we gradually got acquainted. We also took the time to introduce the program and ourselves, the guides, to the participants. Once that was done we wrote out our expectations from ourselves, the group, the program and the guides so as to make sure we were all on the same page. We finished off this session by reading out different rules and guidelines which were meant to ensure that we felt safe, supported and well taken care of with each other.

After a short break, we went inside (the heat and humidity were quite unbearable) and continued with the next part of our activity. We asked the participants to draw the place from which they came, and then each participant had time to share and explain their drawings to the others. It was great to get to know a little bit more about the places we all came from and it was interesting to see how the same places were explained quite differently by different participants. We then had a short break and time to prepare for our next activity - a special tour of Jaffa. Jaffa is an ancient and beautiful port, which functioned as the main gateway to our country for most of its existence. It was the Palestine's main port, and one of its wealthiest cities. However, after the war of 1948 and the establishment of the state of Israel, much of it was destroyed. Its former population was driven out and new Jewish immigrants were brought in to live there. Nowadays it is under the same municipality as the modern city of Tel Aviv (Israel's largest metropolitan city), and its population comprises both Jews and Palestinians.

Abed Sattle, our guide, is a local Palestinian; a nurse by profession and a representative of the Arab council of Jaffa, a longstanding organization aimed to represent and improve the life of the city's Arab population. Abed shared with us his deep knowledge of Jaffa, including its rich history from the time preceding Napoleon's conquest up to the present day. We heard various stories about the city, visited an ancient mosque and saw where one of the movies of famous actor Jean Claude Van Damme was shot. We also learned about the expulsion of most of the Palestinian population of Jaffa during the 1948 war and the discrimination that the remaining Palestinian population faces today.

In the evening we sat in a circle on the beach, which was a very soothing and fitting way to end a very hot (and exciting) day. Not surprisingly, most of the participants mentioned the heat as their biggest difficulty.



This was our last formal activity of the evening and we called it a day. At least, we, the guides, did - the young participants were just getting started...).

Day 2

Part 1: who lives where?

After the tired bodies rolled out of bed we went up to the beautiful rooftop of our hostel where we were greeted by the sea and his good friend the sun. On the roof we began our morning routine, starting with ten minutes of silent meditation. Then we had a short time to share how our (mostly sleepless) night was for everyone and then review our schedule for the day.

Our first activity took us out of the hostel and to Yarkon Park, a grassy recreation area on the banks of a river in northern Tel Aviv. In the park we had an opportunity to play around a bit and spend some time together in the shade of a large oak. We also had a special workshop where the participants divided into three groups and were given a blank map of Israel/Palestine. We gave them colors and asked them to use a different color to mark where different groups of people live: Jews, Arabs, Palestinians, Christians, Muslims, etc. We then looked at the different maps while each group explained why and where they had marked the different groups. We then used our rainbow colored maps as a basis for discussion about the social and political relations between different groups in our country. It was quite an enlightening and interesting activity for both the participants and for us, the guides.

We finished our day in the park with a picnic, then got on the bus and took off for the North. The bus ride was the favorite part of the journey for some of the participants, on the bus they could spend some free time chatting with one another, eating snacks, listening to their IPODS, sleeping and singing songs.

Part 2: The Palestinian “Nakba” (the disaster)

Our bus ride came to a stop at the Village of [Al-Ghabisiyya](#), a Palestinian village which was ethnically cleansed during the 1948 war. There we met Daoud Bader and another representative of the committee of displaced Palestinians in Israel (those who live as Israeli citizens but whose original native towns and villages were destroyed during and after the 1948 war. We had a chance to see the old mosque of the village, which was the only remaining structure.



From the village of Al-Ghabisiyya we went to the village of [Al-Bassa](#), today the Israeli town of Shlomi. There, amongst the modern houses and industrial buildings, we saw the old church and mosque of the original village, which have been sealed off by the Israel Lands Administration.

Our guides explained to us that they are not allowed to enter such mosques and churches because the Israeli government is worried that any recognition of their rights in the area would be seen as an encouragement for them to return to their villages. The tour was quite powerful, insightful and also very sad. It had made an impression on the participants and raised some more serious discussion in our evening session.

From the tour we headed straight to our hostel in Peki'in/Buqei'a. A unique and beautiful multi-religious town in the hills of the Galilee which has large Druze and Christian populations, as well as small Jewish and Muslim communities. We settled into our rooms and gathered for our end-of-the-day discussion. The participants summed up the eventful day using candies and stones. The participants (especially the Jews) said they felt that the tour so far had not been "balanced". They said they felt that only the side of the Palestinians had been heard. Some of the participants said they doubted the version of the events they had heard. Some said they felt they were being blamed for what had happened, and that this made them uncomfortable. The voice of a significant number of the Palestinian participants was largely absent for much of this discussion, and remained so for many other parts of our journey.



Part 3: An "interfaith café"

Our last activity of the day was "hosting", an activity in which every participant was asked to bring something which represented her/his personality, beliefs and culture. Participants brought a variety of objects and content to present, such as pictures, religious symbols, jewelry, prayer books, poems, drawings and songs. Especially memorable, for me, were the very special drawings of one of the participants as well as a hip-hop performance by two of the Palestinian youths and a girl who brought her prenatal ultrasound (!) pictures. It was, all in all, a fun and informative evening, which was followed by another sleepless night for many of our participants. We, the guides, stayed up late discussing the events of the day and wondering how to balance and deepen relations between the Jewish and Palestinian participants in our group.

Day 3

Part 1: Druze, Muslims, Christians and Jews living together in Peki'in/Buqei'a

We began with our usual morning routine of breakfast, meditation and sharing. Afterwards we got back on the bus for a short ride to the center of Peki'in/Buqei'a where we met our local guide, Jalil, and went to our first site on the tour. This was a beautiful natural forest (very rare in our country) with a spectacular view over the whole of the lower Galilee (Galil / Jalil) region. There we heard tales from folklore about the trees and plants and learned about the various government schemes aimed to "Judaize" the Galilee. After spending some time observing the amazing scenery we climbed down the hill and onto the bus, headed for the center of Peki'in/Buqei'a village. There, we stopped to look



at ancient caves believed to be where Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai, a well known and important Jewish scholar, hid from the Romans with his son, surviving for years on carob fruit and deep spiritual learning.

From this site we continued our walk down to the village -- passing, on the way, a Druze house of prayer as well as the ancient Jewish Synagogue of Peki'in/Buqei'a, one of the very few left in the Galilee. The small Jewish community of Peki'in/Buqei'a, which had been there for centuries, has in recent times dwindled. Today, only one of the original families lives permanently in the village. The ancient Synagogue is maintained by an elderly lady who opens it for visiting groups. However, we unfortunately came on "Tisha B'Av", a traditional Jewish day of mourning. The day commemorates various calamities, including the destruction of the First and Second Temples and the dispersion of the Jewish people from their homeland.

Continuing, we took refuge in the "Sheikh's house", an ancient cave-like building which traditionally was where the important people of the village (of all communities) met to discuss important matters. In this impressive old house we spoke with a native Druze who shared with us bits and pieces of this most secretive religion. He told us the story of the formation of the Druze religion, as a small sect which split from Islam, and how it received its name (which was initially derogatory) and a little about the persecution of Jews in countries of the region. He told us about the Druze belief in re-incarnation, and about how Druze souls are of a set number that continually re-incarnate in new bodies. To his explanation he added stories of people whom had discovered their former incarnations, and about their encounters with people they knew from earlier lives. It was a very interesting and unique meeting, which we enjoyed very much.



Part 2: Respecting differences

Our next activity focused on Jewish history during the Second World War and the Shoah (Jewish Holocaust). But before it we stopped for what was in our eyes one of the most important activities of our journey. At this point we divided the group into an Arabic speaking group (for the Palestinian youth) and Hebrew speaking group (for the Jews) and thus created the opportunity to speak in unilingual groups. This enabled the participants to say, in their language, things that they may have felt uncomfortable sharing in the large group.



The whole activity lasted less than 45 minutes but had a strong effect on the group. We felt that tensions within the group had been eased and that, rather than dividing the participants, it brought them closer together.

Part 3: Memory of the child

Our next activity was a tour of the Children's Memorial wing of the [Ghetto Fighters' Museum](#). The Museum is a center for various exhibitions and activities meant to commemorate and educate people about the Shoah. The Children's Memorial wing is an exhibition portraying the experience of the Shoah from the viewpoint of a child. Our guides at the museum were both Jewish and Palestinian. These were Raya, who is also the founder of the Museum's Center for Humanistic Education, and Haneen, a facilitator at the Center. Raya took the Jewish participants for the tour, explaining to them in Hebrew.



Haneen took the Palestinian participants, speaking in Arabic. Beyond easing language difficulties, having separate tours allowed the groups to learn about the Holocaust from their different perspectives. The exhibition and the guides, in their presentation, elicited strong reactions from the participants, so that we ended up having a very deep and intimate experience of the horrors of the Holocaust, made personal by the many human stories which were presented to us.

Part 4: The Center for Humanistic Education

At the [Center](#) we had a joint workshop on our personal and collective memories of the various memorial days for Jews and Palestinians, on the significance of these days and how we use them. For the workshop we were divided into pairs and given sentences like, “remember in order to take revenge”, or “forgive but not forget” or “remember in order to avoid the same from happening to us or to others”. We were instructed to divide the sentences into groups of positive and negative uses of memory. Our disagreements were the topic for discussion. This workshop was a fitting summary to a very positive and moving experience for our group at the Museum, and we were especially happy and relieved since we had initially feared that introducing the difficult issue of the Shoah to our group would add to the tension which was growing in the group. The result was the opposite and our positive experience actually calmed the group down as the Jewish participants felt that they had a chance to have their story heard and the two groups had some time alone and together to digest what they had seen, heard and felt about it all.

Due to the intense day and the many sleepless nights we decided to give the participants and ourselves a night off, so after the end-of-day summary we gave everyone some free time. Our hopes that it would be used by the participants to get some sleep were quickly dissolved, but at least they had some fun together...

Day 4

Part 1: Plain sailing

As usual, we woke up at 7:30, got prepared and had a good breakfast. Afterwards we got together for ten minutes of blessed silence followed by some time to share the many wondrous stories of last night with one another. Today was a special day, though, because after our morning routine we didn't dive into something serious and mentally challenging but rather were off for a day of fun, kayaking in the sea. So we packed our stuff and made the 40-minute drive to “Rosh



Ha-Nikra”, a beautiful beach with chalk cliffs and sea grottos by the Lebanese border. The participants strapped on life vests, put on sun screen and were given a brief introduction to kayaking before jumping into their own kayaks and launching them in the sea. We, the guides, were disappointed to learn that there were only enough kayaks for the participants, but we were compensated by a swim in the sea and a walk through the beautiful grottos while we observed our young kayakers paddle through the waves. We met up with the group as they emerged from the water, telling us their heroic, funny, and sometimes “tragic” (for those who were sea-sick)



stories. We continued to share the excitement while we had our lunches near the beach, and some of the less heroic participants used the time to sleep off their exhaustion.

Part 2: From Galilee to Jerusalem

From Rosh Ha-Nikra we had a long (2.5-hour) journey to Jerusalem (Yerushalayim / Al-Quds). We used the time to chat and sleep, but also to educate ourselves a little bit about things we encountered on the road. Special attention was given (by me) to our Journey along Road No. 6, the new toll road which spans the length of the country from the north to the center and (soon) to the South. I explained to the participants a little about the meaning of a privatized toll road, and the favorable terms (for the construction company) under which it was constructed. After that we had a look out the window to see Israel’s “separation wall”, part of which was built alongside the road. We discussed the consequences of this separation wall for the Palestinian population on whose land it was built. We named three major effects: the annexation of roughly ten percent of Palestinian land in the West Bank, together with wells, farms, etc., the ghetto-isolation of the Palestinian population affected by the wall into small little enclaves, in which their inhabitants are often cut off from their family, friends, workplaces, hospitals, schools etc., and lastly the creation of facts on the ground which will not allow a future Palestinian state to exist and thus making a future peace process that much more difficult.



After my small presentation everyone was free to go back to sleep, which many did, until at long last we reached our final destination on our journey: Jerusalem. In Jerusalem we settled in a hostel near the old city where we had some rest and dinner, and then sat down to summarize our day. The participants gave mixed reviews about the kayak experience; some had enjoyed it immensely, while others had found it too strenuous (though still quite funny...).

Many of them mentioned learning about the separation wall. We were surprised by the lack of knowledge amongst the participants - this time regarding the wall - but also about other issues like their own historical narratives.

We do hope that the “journey” will serve as a touchstone to learn more.

Part 3 : On the Temple Mount/Haram as-Sharif -- The Western Wall of the Jewish Temple

After our summary circle we joined Dalia Landau. Dalia is the founder of the “Open House”, a member organization of GNRC, a partner in this project and a resident of Jerusalem. She took us on a special journey in her beloved city, for a late-night tour of the Western Wall, in the heart of the old city. Beforehand, though,



we watched a special hi-tech movie “the time elevator” where we got to know different stories from Jerusalem over the ages, and about how Jerusalem came to be so significant for each of the three monotheistic religions. Meanwhile, to enhance the effects of the movie, our chairs rocked and rolled and occasionally water sprayed down on us from the ceiling. It was quite an experience, but not quite as the night-time spectacle of the Western Wall itself. Dalia explained to us a little about the wall, how it is the only surviving remnant of what used to be the great Jewish temple, and how its particular location on the Temple Mount made it very special. We then had a chance to get up close, pray, or insert a note with our personal wishes, in the nooks and crannies between the great stones of the wall. It was a very special experience to be there with a mixed group. For most of the Palestinian youth it was the first time and many of them were very curious. Rotem found himself explaining little bits and pieces of Jewish religious tradition to some of the Palestinian youth. Dorit went up to the wall with a Jewish and a Muslim girl who wanted to put a note with their wish between the stones. The atmosphere was very quiet and women were praying silently. Some were crying. Yasmin, the Muslim girl noticed two pigeons, one white and one black who were sitting quietly next to each other in one of the cracks in the wall. It was a special feeling to be present there at this late hour. Dalia who goes to pray there many times said that the place was active and lively for all 24 hours of the day and the night. Though we were very tired it was a wonderful and exciting experience for us, since we were all there together. Slightly after midnight we crawled back to our hostel for what had by now had become another of our daily traditions: sleepless nights.

Day 5

Part 1: The Christian experience

We awoke to an especially hot summer day, with no sign of the relative coolness of Jerusalem’s hilly location. After completing our morning routine we walked down to the Old City with our first guide of the day Johnnie, a Palestinian Christian resident of East Jerusalem’s Beit Hanina neighborhood. The first part of our tour took us to Mount Zion, to the Dormition Abbey where, according to



tradition, the Virgin Mary died. We also visited the place reported to have been where the last supper of Jesus, the Passover feast, took place. From there we stepped outside the Old City walls and walked towards the Mount of Olives, stopping on the way to hear Johnny relate to us various stories from the Christian tradition that relate to Jerusalem. Our walk took us to the foot of the Mount of Olives, to the church of Gethsemane where we saw ancient olive trees (reportedly over a thousand years old) and listened to the beautiful singing of nuns from East Asia, who were conducting a church service. Afterwards, we climbed back up to the Old City (quite a task in the hot sun) and walked part of the Via Dolorosa (Jesus' last walk on his way to be crucified) until we arrived at the Holy Sepulcher. This is the place where Jesus is said to have been buried. The church on the spot is a very grand, old and impressive church frequented by many visitors. We took in the sights and sounds of the church together and when we were done we settled down in a small (air-conditioned!) café in the old city where we had some much needed food, drink and rest. There we thanked Johnnie for the insightful tour and met up with our Muslim guide, Ghassan Mana'sra.

Part 2 : The Muslim experience

Ghassan Mana'sra is a Palestinian Sufi Sheikh from Nazareth who resides nowadays in East Jerusalem. He introduced himself briefly and then walked with us to the Omar Ibn El-Khattab mosque, the first Mosque built in the old city of Jerusalem. There we removed our shoes, the women covered their heads, and we entered this very impressive building. The ancient arched building is carved into the rock so that the temperature even in the flaming summer heat was cool and pleasant. Inside the Mosque, Ghassan related to us the story of the Second Caliph, Omar Ibn El-Khattab who had come to Jerusalem and was received with great honor by the Patriarch. The latter invited him to perform his evening prayer in the church of the Holy Sepulcher. However Omar refused. When asked why, he replied that if he were to do so, future Muslims would say that since Omar had prayed at the church, it should be converted into a mosque. Since he did not want this to happen, he took ten steps from the church and prayed there. True enough, about two hundred years later, a mosque was built on that spot.



Besides this story, we also learned something about the conquests of Salah ad-Din (Saladin) who ousted the Crusaders from Jerusalem, and received an explanation about Sufism and Sufi history in Jerusalem. We shared some of our time at the mosque with a group from the refugee camp of Shuafat. The rest of the time we were there by ourselves (except for a brief visit by the mosque care-takers, who wanted to make sure everything was "alright"). Afterwards, when we left, Ghassan told us that this was the first time he had been able to bring a mixed (Muslim and non-Muslim) group into this mosque.

From the Omar Ibn El-Khattab Mosque we made our way to the Dome of the Rock / Haram as-Sharif, in the hope that we would be allowed to enter Al-Aqsa Mosque as a group. We walked through the narrow alleys of the Old City and once we arrived Ghassan went to check for us the possibility of entering. We were very disappointed when, after some negotiations, only the Muslim participants were allowed to enter, and even an attempt by one of them to get a Christian participant in was unsuccessful (though quite entertaining). So those Muslim participants who were interested in entering went through (along with Vivian who became an honorary Muslim for the day) while the



rest of us had to settle for a peek from the entrance and some rest time. When those who entered the Mosque returned, Ghassan explained to us a little about the history of the place and its importance in the Muslim tradition. With this our tour ended, so we thanked Ghassan and walked back tired and a little disappointed by the ending but altogether quite happy and content with our long day of touring the Old City.

At night we had our usual end of the day session in which everyone shared the stories of the day. The participants talked about how hot they were, how much walking we had to do, etc. They shared how new and interesting the experience was for them, being together in the churches and the mosque. Especially entertaining was the story of George, a Christian participant, who told us that on this day he learned “not to mess with Druze policeman”, after his attempt to enter the Mosque by posing as a Muslim failed due to his very Christian name. After some laughs and giggles and the many words of praise that we lavished on the participants for their very mature behavior during the day, we ended our circle and prepared for the last evening outing.



We walked through a pedestrian mall in the western part of the city and then had some soft drinks and ice-cream, enjoying each other's company.

Finally it was bed time....We had hoped that after four sleepless nights and a long day of walking in the heat they would be wiped-out and sleeping in no time. Our hopes quickly faded, leaving us gasping in awe of the young peoples abilities to function in sleeplessness.

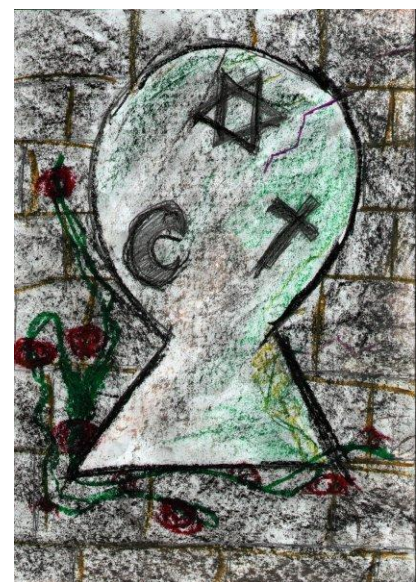
Day 6

Our last morning

The morning of our last day together was radically different than all the other mornings, in that instead of waking up at 7:30, as we usually did, we woke up a full half-hour later, at 8:00. What joy...

We ate our breakfasts and slowly gathered for our morning circle where we had our final meditation session and shared our nighttime adventures. Afterwards, we went up on the roof of the hostel for a special group photo, overlooking Jerusalem, and came back down in order to pack our belongings and clean our rooms. Once that was finished we sat down to summarize our whole week's experience. We started with a little game to warm up and then brought a couple of participants up to the blank board, gave them markers, and together we relayed to them all we had done during this loaded week, so they could write it down. When we were done we had filled the entire board with our many activities, and we observed just how much we had been through together. It was a powerful exercise in reflection.

We then gave out papers and colors and asked the participants to summarize their experience of our journey through drawing. After they had finished, we allowed each participant to share their drawings with the group and relate their experiences to us. Several of the drawings were very impressive, and some very meaningful things were shared. Many of the participants mentioned the great learning experience and the joy of this rare meeting between Jews and Arabs. One of the participants, who had drawn symbols of the three religions in a keyhole, said, “Together we broke the lock, experienced unity between the three religions and got to know one-another better”.



After this exercise, we checked what we had written about our initial expectations for our journey, and allowed the participants time to review them. Did we realize them? It seems that the answer was a big yes, as



we had learned new things about our own cultures and those of the others, gotten to know new people and had had a lot of fun doing so. We then asked the participants to flip the expectations chart and write on them what we expected for the future from ourselves, the group, the program and the guides. This gave us some time to think about what we want to take with us of this experience and make of it, as well as giving us, the guides, an indication of the participants' expectations for the future. Finally, we reminded the group of our meeting to conclude the journey on the coming Thursday and allowed for last comments before departing.

One week after: some reflection on the past and the future

The next week we held a meeting in Neve Shalom ~ Wahat al-Salam, to sum up our experience after a short interval, and to see what we wanted to do as a group in the future. The meeting was attended by 15 of the participants and lasted about two hours. After some small talk at the beginning, we started the meeting with our usual silent reflection. Afterwards Dorit showed us a slide presentation which she had specially prepared using pictures from our Journey. It was quite impressive! We then made a round to hear how the participants had found the week following their return. They gave fairly routine answers, which was a bit disappointing, but nevertheless it was good to know that everyone had been able to rest and hadn't felt a big let-down after all the excitement.

For our next activity, the main activity of the evening, we brought out pictures from the Journey which we had printed and laid these out on the floor. The pictures showed us in the various places we had visited: the old city of Jaffa, the abandoned villages, the Holocaust Museum, the kayaks, holy places, coffee shops and more. We spread the pictures on the floor and allowed the participants to have a look at them. We then asked them to choose a picture which described the relations between the different groups present in the journey (like Jews, Arabs, men, women, etc.).

We went around listening to the answers. Most of the young people chose pictures which showed everyone together and said that this describes how they were all together and enjoyed each others company. No one chose a picture reflecting conflict or tension. We then asked them to choose a picture that describes the most meaningful moment of the journey for them. They were not very concentrated at this point and we were only able to get a few answers, so we cut this part short and had a break for food before moving on to the final part of the evening which was to decide what we want to do in the future with the group.



We told them that we were thinking of conducting another activity in the winter, but were also open to suggestions. A few of the participants suggested that we meet regularly, every time in someone else's village, which is something we had thought of and were quite excited about, but there weren't enough participants willing to take that on, so we left it to their initiative. There were no other serious ideas discussed, so we kind of left it open to anyone who wanted to take the initiative and organize a meeting and

we promised to do our best to help. To close our meeting, we said a few more concluding words and then parted. Perhaps it will be the last time some of us see each other, and perhaps it is the beginning of some very special relationships and activity that will continue deep into our futures – who knows?

Conclusions

All in all, our journey was a great success. We managed to engage in a deep learning experience together. Getting to know more about one another's history, culture and beliefs while strengthening our own identities and forming stronger and more grounded understandings. We were happy that we were able to present difficult and challenging issues to the group and dealt with them without fracturing the relationships within the group and without resorting to hurtful arguments and break-downs. It may have been just a small step in breaking down the deeply entrenched walls of isolation between the different national and religious groups in our country, but it was an important and successful one. In the current climate of despair, small steps such as these are both rare and precious, and we should all feel proud and privileged to have taken part. We hope we have many more chances in the near and far future to experience further change and growth towards a free, pluralistic and fulfilled society.

We thank all those that took part and made this journey a reality, especially The [Arigatou Foundation](#) and the [Global Network of religions for children](#)

I thank Rotem Mor for writing the day-by-day description of the Journey.

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ⁱ A decision was recently made to allow reference to the Nakba in Arabic language text books (though not in Jewish ones).