

"Massa-Massar: A Journey to Discovery"

Mission and History:

The **American Friends of Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam** is dedicated to dialogue, cooperation and a genuine and durable peace between Arabs and Jews, Palestinians and Israelis by encouraging, supporting and publicizing the projects of Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam, the "Oasis of Peace."

Over the last thirty years, the community of **Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam** has grown from a handful of individuals with dreams of living together in harmony to a mature and viable community imbedded in the reality of the conflict. Started as the vision of Father Bruno Hussar, the "Oasis of Peace" demonstrates daily that residents from both national groups and three faith communities can live together peacefully and equally with shared values, despite the conflict surrounding them. The community recognized early on that in order to have a sustained impact and to build positive relations in the region, residents would need to establish and engage in programs that spread its message. Today, the community's bilingual, binational Arab-Jewish Primary School, internationally recognized conflict management programs at its School for Peace, and the Father Bruno Hussar Pluralistic Spiritual Centre are significant programs in the region that bring Jews and Arabs together on a daily basis.

Created in memory of the founder of the village, the **Pluralistic Spiritual Center** reflects the original aims of Father Bruno Hussar who envisioned a place where people of all faiths could live together and appreciate one another's diverse beliefs. Father Bruno, an Egyptian born of Jewish parents and a convert to Catholicism, believed that although the religions of the Middle East have often been a source of division between people, these religions have a common seed that, if nurtured, could serve as a harmonizing influence on the cultural and political conflicts that exist.

Project Mission:

Most young Jews and Arabs in Israel live in separate communities and attend different schools; they don't learn about each other's culture and often have stereotyped ideas about the "other" and ignore the commonalities that exist between their cultures. **Massa-Massar Journey** provides young people an opportunity to meet and develop trusting relationships. The **Massa-Massar Journey**, developed from materials of the Global Network of Religions for Children, is an interfaith learning and peace building program targeting 30 young Jewish, Christian and Muslim Israelis, aged 15-17 years old, boys and girls, from all around Israel. The program invites the group to a 6-day journey of discovery both of their own national, religious and spiritual identity and the identity of other groups sharing the same land. The program was initially conducted in summer 2007 and has repeated annually. (A

detailed journal report of the first 'journey' is attached.)

Project Objectives:

The program promotes the values of *respect* for differences and *empathy* for injustice. It deals with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the spirit of *reconciliation* and encourages the participants to take *responsibility* for creating a better, more just and peaceful future for everyone in the region. The objectives include:

- help young people envision a reality of understanding and peace,
- challenge their stereotypical notions of the "other side,"
- bring deeper understanding of the differences between them in the sense of national and religious realities,
- engage into peaceful transformation of structural and cultural conflicts and violence,
- initiate actions by participants toward coexistence for Jews and Arabs.

Project Description:

The **Massa-Massar Journey** evolves through three stages that provide the youth an opportunity to get to know each other, to understand the process of dialogue, experience their own identity while learning about each others, visit significant sites in Israel and ultimately develop concrete projects together to share the experience with others.

Throughout the course of the program, five issues are central in discussions:

- 1) Exploring the land: the land of Israel/Palestine stands at the Centre of the conflict, there is a need to learn to share it in a just and peaceful way.
- 2) Using two languages – Hebrew and Arabic: to ensure an equal setting for both groups, the whole program is bilingual.
- 3) Exposing the two parallel narratives in the conflict that rarely meet; this program aims at telling them both.
- 4) Getting to know the three monotheist religions: by listening to each other's religious traditions and visiting each other's religious sites in Israel, the participants get a deeper understanding of their own religion and the others'.
- 5) Dialogue & Sharing: every day, participants, with the help of trained facilitators, discuss feelings about what they learn and issues that deal with the conflict.

Stage 1 Pre-Journey: Designed to prepare the participants for the Journey experience, sessions help the participants to initiate a reflection process on their individual identity, their sense of belonging, and their relations with others.

Stage 2 Journey: This 6-day stage, which consists of group traveling to different places in Israel, includes several types of activities that address identity, diversity, recognizing each other's humanity and empowering the young participants both in formal and informal ways. From site visits with local guides (to symbolic villages, the Ghetto Fighters' Museum, Yad Vashem, the Separation wall, or

the holy sites in Jerusalem) to workshops with facilitators, group discussions or informal activities such as kayaking, the participants are given a chance to get to know each other, while they learn about their respective culture. This allows both theoretical and practical understanding and connection to grow among the young Arabs and Jews.

Stage 3 Post-Journey: Reflects on the Journey experience and transforms the experience into concrete action. Examples of participant activities include organizing a community event for families & friends that creatively shares the story of the journey; developing a website that chronicles the journey experiences in stories, blogs, photos & video; or using low-tech flip video cameras to produce a series of YouTube videos with wide distribution.

Method:

The Pluralistic Spiritual Centre utilizes a dialogue method that places the conflict at the heart of discussion. Instead of asking participants to put away their differences and attempt to find a common ground to get along, the discussion addresses stereotypes and biases and the reasons behind them. Participants discuss issues such as language, land, rights, and equality. Participants develop an awareness of their own role in the Jewish-Palestinian conflict. At a young age, they are given an opportunity to explore their own identity through interaction with the other side and understand the role of identity in conflict. At the same time, they learn how to break away from the embedded patterns that pervade binational relationships and acquire conflict-management tools that rely on dialogue.

Impact:

These opportunities for dialogue have a growing impact on the society at large. Workshops are designed to create dialogue between Palestinians and Jews. Facilitators guide discussions and foster negotiation. The Pluralistic Spiritual Centre does not expect to solve differences, but instead hopes to provide a rare opportunity for both sides to hear each other out. This is often the first time for many participants to meet and talk to someone from the other side. As participants evaluate their opinions and listen to those of the other side, they come to a better understanding of the complexity of the Jewish-Palestinian conflict and develop tools to deal with it. It is expected that these opportunities for dialogue will have a growing constructive impact on the society at large.

Key Personnel:

Dorit Shippin has been a leading member of Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam for many years. Moving to the community in 1984, she has worked in management positions in various departments of the village. She helped to coordinate the development of the hotel while it doubled in size and expanded its activities. Since 2001, Ms. Shippin has been in charge of the development of the Pluralistic Spiritual Centre. This has entailed identifying needs, choosing directions for project areas and launching pilot programs for diverse target populations. A skillful organizational networker, Ms.

Shippin has created partnerships with numerous other organizations. Besides her directorship of the Pluralistic Spiritual Centre, Ms. Shippin was elected as the first woman to chair Neve Shalom - Wahat al-Salam's Municipal Council in September 2008.

Abdessalam Najjar is one of the early members of Neve Shalom / Wahat al-Salam and founding member in each of the community's educational institutions. A born educator and communicator, he has dedicated his life to support dialogue efforts between Palestinians and Jews, and has similarly worked in other conflict areas of the world - notably in Kosovo. Mr. Najjar has published numerous articles on peace work and has been featured in TV and documentary films. Mr. Najjar has held many leadership positions in the community and today is a member of the Pluralistic Spiritual Centre team.

Evaluation:

Over the years, the Pluralistic Spiritual Centre has relied on qualitative data such as stories, anecdotes, interviews and personal reflections to illustrate the participants' experiences in changing perspectives as a result of the journey. Interviews with participants will be conducted throughout the program, as well as in follow-up sessions after the completion of the program in order to evaluate the program's success. The evaluation process will include both written feedback (through questionnaires) and follow-up oral interviews with each participant.

Budget:

Details	Expenses \$
Two meetings (before the Journey)	
Transportation	483
Facilities and refreshments	240
Facilitators	720
The Journey: 6 days in July	
Transportation for 6 days	2,400
Room and board for 6 days (30 participants + staff)	8,640
Facilitators and chaperons	6,000
Tour guides and lectures	720
Activities and miscellaneous	720
Income from participants 300NIS / \$72 x 30	-2,160
5 meetings (after the Journey)	
Transportation	1,200
Facilities and refreshments	600
Facilitation	1,800
Project administration for 12 months	11,520
Technical support for participants projects	1,200
Office expenses	600
Administrative expenses	1,800
Total	36,480