



Oasis of
Peace



Massa-Masar-("Journey") Program May 7-11 / 2015

of the **Pluralistic Spiritual Community Center** of
Wahat al-Salam - Neve Shalom and the **Open House, Ramle**.



Empowering young leaders... Learning about diversity... Meeting the other face to face...bringing hope !

A group of 30 Jewish, Muslim and Christian teenagers on a 4-day Journey to visit and learn together about Israel's diverse communities.

*"There is hope. This proves that we can live together, that it's not that hard."
(16-year-old participant)*



Two veteran organizations in the field of Jewish – Arab relations working together to create social change

The **Pluralistic Community Spiritual Center (PSCC)** at Wahat al Salam - Neve Shalom, and the “**Open House**” in Ramle, have been focusing their efforts on developing youth leadership through the **Massa – Masar** (“Journey”) program. This program works with high school age **Jewish and Arab youth** in different forums, with the goal of building leadership by giving participants the tools, knowledge and confidence to meet and work with the ‘other’.

In March 2015, we began working with **Givat Brener High School** (Jewish) and the Christian **Orthodox School** (Arab), in Ramle, creating a partnership that includes students from these school's **11th and 12th grade classes**.

*"I will start to tell people that Jews are not all bad - some want peace!"
(17-year-old Arab participant)*

The purpose

We aim to deepen learning through experience and to strengthen values such as self-respect, respect for the other, equality between people and groups, social justice, respect for nature and the environment. We believe that in this way, students will begin to assume responsibility for the society they live in. Our program takes place in the inter-group context of relations between Jews and Palestinians of Israeli citizenship. The self-knowledge acquired through the **Journey**, will contribute to dialogue, to fostering mutual respect and peace between Jewish and Palestinian youth, and towards building a more integrated society. The Massa-Masar program is led by experienced Jewish and Arab facilitators working together with young graduates of previous programs.

The Massa-Masar program

The program integrates seminars and meetings that explore self and identity with outdoor nature exploration and cultural encounters with different groups, including other high school students. Work with the students begins in each high school (separately), where Jewish and Arab facilitators meet with the Jewish and Arab groups, exploring with them issues of religion, identity and the Jewish-Arab relations; preparing the youth to meet the 'other'.

Some - in fact the majority - of the facilitators were young graduates from the last Massa-Masar program. They were therefore able to build a bridge between the more senior facilitators and the young participants. They did excellent work, providing an amazing example of what it means to be a leader, take responsibility and lead sessions.

"It was such an inspiring experience not only for the youth but also for me. As a dialogue facilitator, I always get the energies I need from the youth. They give me hope and remind me that together we can work for a better future. For a shared future. Programs like these always remind me that Peace begins with YOUTH!" – Young facilitator Bissan Salman

The process

After conducting a few separate meetings with each group in the schools, we finally brought the two groups together for a day-long encounter at Wahat al Salam - Neve Shalom, where the Jewish and Arab youth got to know each other through social activities, workshops and seminars.



Two weeks later, we initiated a 4-day, 3-night outdoor nature exploration, which included traveling and hiking through the country, visiting different locations between Ramle and Jerusalem, meeting various people and diverse communities, and seeing a number of historical sites. In each place, people shared their stories about the place and their lives, while helping the group to better understand their area and its realities.

This program was filmed, providing material for a brief documentary of the gathering. It will soon be edited into a short film for wide distribution.

The journey

"I would like to meet with more Arabs. I would like to live in a mixed city, step by step. I don't think this would totally solve the conflict, but hatred does not have to be a part of it." (16-year-old Jewish participant)

In our Journey we visited the **Orthodox School** in Ramle and Ramle's old town. We were hosted in a **local artist's** home, listening to the story of Dalia from the **Open House** and heard the history of the **Karaite** community at their synagogue. From there, we traveled to Jerusalem for an overnight stay. This gave us the opportunity for group reflection. The next day, we had a walking tour of Jerusalem. We met with an ultra orthodox Jewish woman in **Mea Shearim** who discussed what it is like growing up within the ultra-orthodox community. We visited the Palestinian neighborhood of **Sheikh Jarakh** and listened to young activists who spoke of their struggle to protect the community against colonization. We also listened to a member of the **Ethiopian Church** community. Thereafter we traveled to the Oasis of Peace, for a program that included a full day and 2 nights. We were able both to learn about the shared Arab-Jewish community and to reflect on all we had seen. We also met nuns from the Beatitudes Christian community near **Latroun**, and traveled to the **Arab town of Abu Ghosh**, where we met with the imam of the large mosque. In nearby **Nataf**, we met representatives of this mixed Jewish religious and non-religious community. Finally, among other experiences, we visited a synagogue, where we heard hazanic singing.



"I have been on another such journey with people, but it was not like Masa-Massar. These were different, special people." (16-year-old participant)



Through this process the youth discovered together much about their own identities and those of their neighbors. They came to understand more about the diversity of human experience and culture within the narrow physical space that we all inhabit.

A month after the Journey, we met again for a heart-warming get together. This time, the Jewish kibbutz of Givat Brener played host. The young people mainly wanted to hug and share experiences and stories. Peace was fully present in the room.

"This Journey changed me. I will always ask questions. I will try to help everyone. I don't promise but I will listen and try. It is important to hear before you judge." (16-year-old participant)



[Massa-Masar Photo Album:](http://photos.wasns.org/index.php?category/624)
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