

# THE OLIVE BRANCH

Youth Magazine of Seeds of Peace | Volume VIII Issue II | Summer 2004



## Taking the Initiative



Seeds Graduates: Active and Shaping the Future

Egypt and Jordan: Renewed Vigor in Regional Programming

Afghanistan: Accepting the Past, Looking to the Future

India/Pakistan: Is Peace on the Horizon?

United States: Grappling with Immigration and Diversity





# The Olive Branch

Summer 2004 Volume 8 Issue 2

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Front Credit: Afghan Seed Mir Akhgar explains his point to a group during a discussion session (Credit: Courtesy of Marieke Van Woerkom); With the aid of string, the group at Beit Berl ties itself together (Credit: Jen Marlowe)  
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The Olive Branch is a youth magazine written and edited by youth from Afghanistan, Albania, Bosnia, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Egypt, FYROM, Greece, India, Israel, Jordan, Kosovo, Morocco, Palestine, Pakistan, Qatar, Romania, Serbia, Tunisia, Turkey, Yemen and the United States, who are part of the Seeds of Peace program.

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Seeds of Peace is a non-profit, non-political organization that helps teenagers from regions of conflict learn the skills of making peace. Set at our own camp in Maine, a safe environment is created where youngsters can air their views and learn leadership and conflict resolution techniques required to end the cycles of violence.



# Letters

## **Seeds of Peace Cookbook**

Seeds of Peace is beginning a project to help support the Seeds of Peace education fund: an international cookbook, consisting of recipes donated by Seeds, their families, SOP Supporters and SOP staff.

We are appealing to everyone involved in SOP to donate a favorite recipe to this project. You can do this by e-mail, fax or post. You can e-mail your recipe to Karen Abu Zant (parent of Seed Jamal from 2000) at [palkaren@hotmail.com](mailto:palkaren@hotmail.com) (please put "cookbook" in the subject) or fax or mail it to the SOP Center in Jerusalem.

All recipes must be in English and should use Imperial measurements when possible, but if submitted in metric, we will add Imperial equivalencies to the recipe ingredients.

We hope to finish this project by Fall 2004. Therefore, we would appreciate a quick response to our appeal.

We would also love some other Seed parents to partner with me in helping with this project! If you have a parent who might be interested in working with me on this, please ask them to contact me!

Thank you for your anticipated support of this project.

**Karen Abu Zant (Tulkarem)**

## **Responses by soldiers in the IDF**

*Seeds in the Israel Defense Forces respond to last issue's Coexistence Hotline about being a Seed and a soldier*

My name is Yona and I am an Israeli seed from 2000 (and 2001) and like most of the Jewish Israeli seeds of my year I have joined the Israeli army. The army takes up most of my time these days and makes it pretty much impossible to participate in Seeds of Peace activities and meetings. Still, I feel I am able to stay a Seed.

In the course I am taking in the army, every week someone is given 20 minutes or so to teach the rest of the class about any topic that comes to mind - theater, wine, dreams, tap dancing, whatever you want to tell about. This week I used these 20 minutes to tell my class about Seeds of



(Credit: Bobbie Gottschalk)

The Seeds of Peace Student Advisory Council, pictured here in Washington, DC, is a group of Seeds from around the world who study in the United States and organize events for Seeds and their campuses.

Peace. It may sound strange to talk about peace in the army but to me it seems the most logical thing in the world. The army is one of the places where it is easiest to lose track of the normal people on the other side since you are constantly dealing with the enemies on the other side.

I told my class about John, about camp, coexistence, identity and about how Seeds of Peace stays active in the region. My classmates took interest and asked questions and still, when the 20 minutes were up I knew there were millions of things left to say. All and all I think it went well, I hope it opened a small view to people of things they had never stopped to think of before. I have been in the army for a bit over 3 months. I still can't really see myself as a soldier. The army may have made it hard for some of you to see me as a Seed. I do think that I can be both - a soldier and a Seed.

**Yona Kaplan (Jerusalem)**

My name is Liat. I am 20 years old, and was in camp during summer of 1998. I am in the Israeli military for a year and 4 months now, and I serve in the IDF Liaison and Foreign Relations Department, which is actually a great place for Israeli Seeds to serve.

I work with foreign forces in the

region, and for the last five months I served in the north. When I took my unit's course we had the same thing, and I spoke about Seeds of Peace in my presentation, for a bit longer, and actually the others just wanted to hear MORE AND MORE!

I feel that my job in the army is pretty much similar to being a Seed. It's about being open minded, building (work) relationships with soldiers from other armies, and most importantly, what we call CBM - confidence building measures - which I have taken from my experience in Seeds.

**Liat Margalit (Jerusalem)**

## **Apology and Correction**

In the Winter 2004 Edition of The Olive Branch, an article submitted by Nicolas Papamichael, a Greek Cypriot from Nicosia, included the term "Turkish Cyprus." Mr. Papamichael never used such a term in his original article and this was a grievous and unfortunate mistake by the editorial staff during the editorial process. I have already sent a personal apology to Mr. Papamichael and would like to assure him and all of our readers that a mistake of this sort will never occur again.

**Seth Wikas, Editor-in-Chief, The Olive Branch**



# Letter from the Editor

**I**t appears that summer in Jerusalem has finally arrived. The days are hot, the sun has started to become oppressive, and every day I appreciate the cool air at the Center. But the longed-for vacation months have not arrived smoothly. In my mind, a lot of false starts and sputtering occurred to get us to this time of year. There was a week of unbearably hot weather followed by a week that forced me to wear my sweater and jacket. During late April, it seemed like four seasons came at different times on the same day. Summer was unsure about its arrival and winter and spring did not want to yield the stage.

As with the weather, so with world events. The relative peace and stability of last summer in the Middle East, which allowed us to have a fantastic Summer at the Center program, bringing Seeds from Israel, Gaza and the West Bank together for the first time since 2000, now seem but a distant memory, in the wake of the violence in Rafah that has taken a horrific number of lives. The apparent calm felt in the Balkans since the 1999 ceasefire was shattered in March with renewed ethnic clashes, loss of life and massive property damage. And in Cyprus,

a change was felt in the air with a reunification plan that ultimately failed.

But there are bright spots-as the staff put together this issue of the magazine, India and Pakistan, but a year ago on the verge of nuclear war, crafted a novel strategy to settle the conflicts that divide the two nations. Indo-Pakistani cricket matches, which saw over a thousand Indians flock to Pakistan, brought the two nations even closer together. In Afghanistan, SOP staff led a number of workshops for Seeds there, instilling in them the hope that they can make a difference in their communities and their country. And since last summer, there have been efforts to bring Jordanian and Egyptian Seeds into the regional fold, by holding more ongoing programs between them, Palestinian and Israeli Seeds.

Perhaps one of the brightest spots over the past few months is Seeds of Peace's effort and realization that it must truly be the organization of its participants. Graduates of our program from all over the world have met at various seminars, workshops and conferences to discuss the future of the organization, how it can be more effective, what it does well, and where it can improve. In this magazine issue, some of our graduates recount these

activities, and Olive Branch staff even caught up with two of them about their life and activities since graduating from Seeds of Peace.

Finally, while ensuring that our organization addresses the concerns of our participants, graduates and future leaders, we have tried to make The Olive Branch follow a similar model. Instead of being a publication composed of Seed articles and managed by Center staff, Seeds from all over the world are now assisting as regional and assistant editors.

My deepest thanks for this issue go to Assistant Editors Dana Naor from Holon and Manar Al Natsha from Hebron, Seeds alumni who contributed invaluable input and advice on making this magazine accurately reflect the interests and concerns of our Seeds, who range in age from 14-25.

Now that summer is here to stay, I hope that there will be no fits and starts in the weather or the global political situation. We have another amazing camp in Maine, a busy summer program in the Middle East and ongoing programming in the Balkans, Cyprus and South Asia. Drink lots of water, get lots of rest, and have a great summer!

Seth

## Letter from the Camp and Center Director

*Seeds of Peace Vice President and Camp Director Tim Wilson was appointed in February of 2004 to be the Director of the SOP Center for Coexistence in Jerusalem. Since February, Tim has been in the region monthly and will join the Center staff permanently in September 2004.*

When Seth asked me to write, I was not very willing, and that probably has to do with my newness at this job. Plus, what do I say to many of you, whom I have known as just campers? Now I am in your HOUSE, very humble and learning each day from old Seeds and new ones. As the Center Director there will be program changes, most of those coming as a result of continuing dialogue

with Center staff, new Seeds, graduates, as well as older alumni. I could try to soft soap things but as you know, that is not me. The Center staff is working on worthwhile summer programming, as are other folks in all our regions. Soon, I will be more forthcoming with ideas for the future. But I need your help. I also need you to keep focused on these things: respect, communication and trust. After being in the region every month since last November, I can only ask you to work with your fellow Seeds to develop a meaningful program in your local communities and continue to discuss your differences with respect and dignity. Let us be a real light of hope. Yes, camp was and is important but the region is

more important. 24 days vs. 341 days. THIS IS WHY I COMMITTED MYSELF TO YOU. Whether you are from South Asia, Cyprus, the Balkans, Middle East or the US, please try to be supportive of each other, but allow yourselves room to discuss issues using The Olive Branch or Seedsnet. Finally, I thank this big family of Seeds for urging me on.





# Losing an Angel: Alba Turani



Photo Credit: Rinor Sadiku

**O**n March 14, 2004, Alba Turani, a Seed from Albania, was tragically killed in a car accident. Alba first came to the Balkans Camp in Olympia, Greece in 2000 and had been involved with Seeds of Peace ever since. Alba was a dear friend and kept in touch with many of her Seeds friends over via email and letters. Below, Balkan Seeds share tributes in memory of their beloved friend.

## Dear Honorable Alba's Family,

Words cannot express our deep pain for the loss of Alba, our dear friend. Although we had a possibility to know her for only one week, it was enough to know her pretty well, to be able to realize the kindness and sincerity of her soul. Alba was really friendly, she was sweet for everyone.

The best memories of her will always be alive in our hearts. She is not dead, she will always be amongst us. We'll remember her with lots of love and respect.

**Agon Myftari, Arta Osmanaj, Erblin Mehmetaj, Gent Salihu, and Rinor Sadiku**

## Dear Seeds staff, counselors, friends and everyone who had a chance to know her:

For all of those who knew or didn't, guys I am sorry, we have lost a great friend, a wonderful person, one of the greatest Seeds SOP has ever had. No words can express the sorrow and pain we all feel about Alba. I will always remember you my dear Alba. May God rest your soul in heaven.

**Agon Myftari (Pristina)**

## Memories with Alba

It was July 23, 2003. In the chilly morning of this scorching day I ended up at the bus station waiting for Abi and Alba to arrive from Albania in order to join us for the workshop in Brezovica, Kosovo. I waited and waited until I lost my patience and as I was making the first step back home here they came. I was very happy to see them and in the meantime very relieved from a great stress.

Because they had arrived hours ahead of the workshop I took them to my house for a little rest. My mom got to know and like them, especially Alba very much. Alba who seemed shy at first was very communicative and discerning.

We started conversing on different topics and the years we had been at Seeds of Peace. It was that very moment when I got to know that she had been denied US visa and therefore she could never taste the camp in Maine. Ouch it touched me deep down but she wouldn't show any sign of rage or incomprehensibility. So, I had just started to know the brilliant cherubic Alba who was thoughtful, mature and extremely understanding.

During the workshop in Brezovica we wanted to make the most out of it, to use every minute and spend as

much as possible time together. I wish the staff had let us assemble (boys and girls in one place) and spend more time together at nights. This way we would have been able to cherish her more.

Her kindness made her be a friend to everyone. She had many friends and it makes me think as though she really followed the words of our all-time best and forever Seed, John: "Make one friend."

Once the workshop ended and she went back home, she sent me, Arta and some others postcards via Agon who went to Albania on summer holidays. This showed how friendly, caring and grateful she was. I keep it in my drawer and each time my eyes fall upon it arouses the best indelible memories on me which in the meantime sadden me greatly.

The death of Alba was a tragic loss not only for her family but also for me, Seeds of Peace and everyone else who knew and surrounded her. She was a wonderful human being -a great Seed with the capability to effect great things in both her country and abroad. I feel super proud to have met and had her as my friend. I feel great sorrow and I know all of the Seeds of Peace Family no longer has her among us but I know she hasn't abandoned us, she still lives -AN ANGEL IN HEAVEN.

**Erblin Mehmetaj (Pristina)**



# Where Do We Go from Here?

**I**n May, adult Egyptian, Israeli, Jordanian and Palestinian Seeds met in Cyprus to discuss the future and priorities of Seeds of Peace. While differing in outlook, each Seed - older and wiser - remains committed to the organization's mission.

## Pioneering Spirit

Yaron Avni (Ashkelon)



The legacy of a pioneer includes the continuation of his great contribution to society, the foundations of the life he has lived and the sense of responsibility he leaves to his followers. The followers must not let their heritage die and must make their dreams come true at all costs. They are the first, usually do not see their vision come true, yet see it vividly in their heart. This feeling is in the air between the succeeding generations and those generations feel obligated to the new tradition not by some sort of force, but by honor.

This pioneering spirit made America what it is today. The land where everything is possible would not be that way, if it wasn't for the spirit. In many ways, the first Jewish pioneers have made my great country what it is today: democratic, Western, strong economically and militarily. They were the ones who made it all come true - and we are trying, although unsuccessfully sometimes, to follow their human, but gigantic, footsteps. Robert Frost said, "Two roads diverged in the wood, and I, I took the one less traveled by - and that has made all the difference." By attending Seeds of Peace, we all took the road less traveled by.

During the Graduates Conference in Cyprus, we started to examine the foundations of our Seeds of Peace heritage. Someone said in Cyprus, "In the beginning, no one thought how this organization would look like in 10 years." Ten years later, we see what it looks like: bigger but still with as much intimacy as possible, a lot more connected to the thoughts and feelings of its elders and running more appropriate activities for both younger and older Seeds. It also serves as a link between all the Seeds who have ever attended the program and still feel obligated to its founding principles. By allowing Seeds to reach their enormous potential (as shown by the seminar in Cyprus), the organization is gradually moving toward the concept of the older Seeds "running the show." We are committed to developing an organization that is far more connected to the societies in which it is working, and taking among its lines the finest to lead their communities in various fields.

The Middle East is in a very delicate position. It is at a fork in the road. We must let it take the road less traveled by. We must be the pioneers who will raise the flag of peace and prosperity to the region. Sounds like a dream? Not for a true pioneer . . .

## Overdue Reunions in Cyprus

Sami Ammous (Cairo)



During the Graduates Conference in Cyprus in May, a number of Seeds from 1998 and earlier discussed the maturing of the SOP organization and where it's headed. Much was discussed and talked about in the conference, but what got me thinking most was how those who were there have matured since I'd last seen them.

I got to see people I haven't seen since '97 or '98. On the outside some haven't changed much, others I barely recognized, but all of them have become wiser. That first night when I got there, I was introducing myself to people and saying hello to people I already knew, but as Shira (from Israel) put it, I had to reintroduce myself to most people. You hear that he did so and so, and she impressed everyone by saying so and so, and a bunch did that and some didn't like it. It would take a small book to cover what 30 people did in eight years, but each person's accomplishments were amazing on their own scale. Some went through things that made them stronger, others have become more forgiving and others became angrier.

But there is one thing that has not changed in these past years: the belief in peace. Through their experiences, each has developed his/her unique vision of how that peace should be and how it's supposed to be accomplished, but what did not waver was the overall consensus that violence would lead nowhere. Some wanted more closeness between Arabs and Israelis, others thought that contact should be personal but not public. Some thought the organization should expand into community service and do more than peace-making. The diversity of the opinions and stances was great and what we were able to accomplish in these three days quite frankly surprised me. But what surprised me most is that though things are as bad as they are, there remains a spark of peace in the minds of everyone who attended camp many years ago.



# Continuing Education



Shira Kaplan (first row, right) and fellow Seeds at the UWC conference in New Mexico

**S**eeds of Peace graduates, those who have finished high school, continue to be active, taking part in activities that give them new skills to chart the organization's future. A mediation workshop in Jerusalem and graduate conference in New Mexico were two such activities.

## Learning to Mediate

**Kherallah Bazbaz (Jerusalem)**

"It is a third party that helps the partners of conflict reach an agreement that serves the interest of the two parties." This is what the Mediation Course held for Seeds of Peace graduates during the summer of 2003 was all about. I enjoyed that course a lot, not only because of the company of my friends, but because of the simulations we held each week to help us build our mediation skills. At first they started with negotiation: the simulation had a message that cooperation between the parties is the easiest way to make the most profit.

In order to reach a solution to a conflict, we learned skills for active listening and mirroring. We learned to ask questions that give the person in the conflict the chance to listen to himself or herself in order to realize his interests and those of the other party. Personally, I felt that most of the problems and conflicts between people can be solved if they just listen to each other, really know what they want and not carry on fighting and arguing just for the sake of having the last word or being stubborn. This observation was shown as a pyramid: interests lie at the base and the goal lies at the top.

The mediation process has a well-shaped structure that consists of several stages of work between both parties together or individually. These stages depend on open questions, so as to let the parties be more open and able to speak. This requires a very important factor in this process: trust. That sets the right tone for the truth to come out. Eventually, a mediator doesn't have the answer or the solution for the problem. The mediator is just helping the parties to come up with the solution themselves.

During the course I discovered that I was avoiding lots of problems in my life, and I didn't realize that we use negotiation and mediation in our daily life. After this course, however, with all the simulations and movies that we watched, I saw mediation, negotiation, and difficult conversations are a part of life. It started to help me to look at things and deal with them differently.

After that course we had small workshop about "difficult conversations." What I most remember from the workshop is that lots of the time we don't know much about the people or things around us. We start building assumptions that shape the way we deal with these things or people. We don't bother to ask, to learn what we don't know or we are ashamed or afraid maybe to ask. The worst thing is when our assumptions become facts that we believe in and never want to change.



## Asking Important Questions

**Shira Kaplan (Herzliya)**

Seeds of Peace is making every possible effort to trace its alumni and gather them in one place. Even if it is just for the sake of hanging out, the very fact that we, the alumni, meet after seven or eight years of not having seen each other has a remarkable effect on our lives. Whether we are studying in the Middle East or living in the United States, reuniting with our long-lost peers from camp means revitalizing old friendships. Moreover, it means adding another name - which

The March conference held in Montezuma, New Mexico was an attempt to bring together nine Seeds alumni who studied at the United World Colleges (UWC). UWC is a chain of 10 international schools scattered around the world, from Canada to Singapore, where students from 80 countries study on a scholarship and adhere to the mottos of peace and international understanding. As the two programs (Seeds and UWC) are fundamentally similar and promote parallel ideals, they have come to acknowledge each other throughout the years. The outcome is that nowadays there are some 30 Seeds between the ages of 16 and 18 who are studying in one of these schools abroad.

The aim of the conference was to establish an official link between the two organizations and to encourage their cooperation in the future. Another objective was for the alumni of both programs to know each other and constitute a Seeds/UWC forum. As these alumni have a lot in common - both the Seeds of Peace program and the UWC two-year experience - they are likely to find a common language and work with each other more easily in certain fields (community service, NGOs, etc).

We were invited to Montezuma, a small town in the green heights of New Mexico, by Phil Geier, the headmaster of the United World College of Armand Hammer (UWCAH). During the conference we attended presentations made by 16-year-old UWC students on the Arab-Israeli and the Indo-Pakistani conflicts, shed a tear at the touching monologue of the Israeli storyteller Noa Baum and swam in the hot springs that belong to the college. On the third day of the conference we gathered with Seeds staff members Bobbie and Megan and debated some serious issues concerning Seeds of Peace: Where is the organization heading? What is our role as Seeds alumni in leading the organization? And, should Seeds of Peace have a mission statement, like the UWC one? We did not answer all of these questions during such a short conference, but these were important issues that we, as graduates, discuss on an ongoing basis in order to ensure a healthy future for Seeds of Peace.



# Where Are They Now?

**W**ith Seeds of Peace participants spread throughout the world, it is sometimes hard to keep track of all of them. But two Olive Branch writers, Adir Yanko and Nardine Jildeh, caught up with graduates - Karim Mahmoud from Cairo and Anna Tunkel from Ashdod - who are making a difference in their communities.

## "Seeds Was a Turning Point" - Karim Mahmoud (Cairo)



His name is Karim Mahmoud. Currently he is in his second year of communication and electronics engineering study at Cairo University. However, his interests and involvement seem to be different from his studies. He likes the arts, acting, music, literature and sports, and writes poetry in both Arabic and English. Karim even worked for a while as a DJ, was a goalie for several youth soccer teams and currently practices kickboxing. He has a number of social and charitable involvements with a variety of organizations. Yup, Karim is a busy guy.

*What is Seeds of Peace for you?*

I would say that for me Seeds means the people within and the relationships that evolve. I have not been back to camp in seven years, but I'm still connected.

*What have you done since you came back from camp?*

You know, the first thing that year (1997) was that I made so many friends socially equipped with the skills from camp and all. I started focusing on community service. In Egypt it's called charity. I also took part in simulations and workshops held and conducted by youth, such as MAL (Model Arab League). In the past year most of my work has been involved with Seeds of Peace in Egypt. I am concentrating nowadays on launching the SOP Graduates Alumni Association, which I hope will be huge, an event bookmarked in the organization's history.

*How do people around you accept you being in Seeds?*

Well, people around me usually know me. They know that when Karim is into something it means that he has given it good thought and it must be an advantage to him as a person. Therefore they respect my choice. Some of the close people even tend to get in and participate.

*Do you think Seeds helped in developing your leadership qualities?*

I really believe that within everyone lies a leader's spirit in slumber. All you need is to get it out. In order to get it going, you need either a major turning point or a very determined personality. Seeds of Peace appears to be the major turning point. So, the answer is yes, Seeds of Peace helped. I would like to say something about the leadership qualities: some people think that it is the power or ability to boss everyone around or call on things and make decisions. I'm convinced that leadership is basic. Simply, it is the skill to lead your life, the power to control and plan for the future.

Adir Yanko (Ashkelon)

## "Each of Us Needs to Put in the Effort" - Anna Tunkel (Ashdod)



*You are currently working at the Hotline for Migrant Workers and have also worked at Physicians for Human Rights. What were your activities at each of these places?*

I am currently the coordinator for the Human Trafficking Project at the Hotline for Migrant Workers. We deal with migrant workers detained in Israeli jails awaiting deportation. They did not commit any crimes but are in Israel illegally. My organization assists them legally and emotionally, and provides support for families and attempts to prevent inhumane treatment. My project, anti-human trafficking, deals with harsh cases involving women who are brought into forced prostitution. Some of these women are interested in prosecuting those who forced them into this line of work. We record their stories, lobby the Knesset, do fundraising and keep in touch with women who testify.

Last year, I worked at Physicians for Human Rights. It provides alternative health care for Palestinian territories and believes that Palestinians should be provided with medical treatment since they are under Israeli influence. It works to promote awareness and rights for the Bedouins in the Negev. It also promotes the rights of prisoners within the Israeli jails. I helped to promote healthcare rights for migrant workers, by providing healthcare alternatives and information for potential lawsuits.

*How did you get interested in these organizations?*

At first I did not know what these organizations did, but realized they did important work. There is a large migrant worker population and they do not have many rights. It is crucial that Palestinians, as well as migrant and guest workers, be able to receive medical care and services. Physicians for Human Rights opened an open clinic in south Tel Aviv, where they have doctors that work voluntarily and receive migrant worker patients.

*How do you believe the future will be for Israelis and Palestinians?*

I'm hopeful there is a solution but it's very hard to be optimistic. The social and political situation is extremely frustrating. People are hungry and don't have money to feed their children. Daily, I face the ugly realities inside Israeli society, dealing with migrant workers and seeing how their rights are being violated. I hope that it will be a better world. For that to happen, each of us needs to put in the effort, each in his respective niche.

Nardine Jildeh (Jerusalem)



# Ramallah Seminar: Taking the Message Home

**I**n February, Palestinian Seeds held a seminar in Ramallah to discuss their people's future and plan projects for their communities. Two Seeds share the results of these efforts.

## A New Project is Born

Nadeen Zoorba (Jerusalem)

The Palestinian refugee case is over 36 years old. Although many countries and organizations have tried to find solutions for this case, they haven't found something suitable except helping them with food and shelter. During our Seeds of Peace seminar in Ramallah in February 2003, we tried to also come up with suggestions with a project designed to help those living in refugee camps.

I brought up the idea with other Seeds, while we held the workshop in the Grand Park Hotel in Ramallah. We discussed many projects we wanted to do for our fellow Palestinians and in the end we decided to help a refugee camp. Between many plans I decided that making a party for those living in the camps was a suitable one, and it would give the refugees a good impression about Seeds of Peace.

The project is now under way and I am in discussions with the staff in the Center on how to get the project off the ground. This project will be done with the Old City youth organization in Jerusalem. I also told the students in my school about the project and they are interested, so two people from the staff will visit my school, Al-Neithamya, and will tell them about Seeds of Peace in general and specifically about the project.

When I was asked by people why I was interested in doing this project, I told them that it was for two reasons. The first one is that the project is dealing with a very large part of my community, whose life is very difficult, so the idea of helping refugees interested me a lot. Secondly, this is the first time that I am planning a serious, long term project, and it is no longer just an idea.

This experience makes me want to give advice to everyone: if you want to do anything, don't think it is impossible. You must try until you reach your goal.



## Hope for a Brighter Future

Zena Abu Raed (Nablus)

Liberty is a meaningful word for those who live it completely, either politically, economically or socially. It is meaningful for those who have an independent country, live in good situations and can make decisions freely. But I, along with my friends from Seeds, forgot the horrible situation for a few moments and realized that we could make decisions for ourselves and our future.

We attended the seminar that took place in Ramallah in February and there we had been told that we should do ongoing projects in our cities. So we, the Seeds of Nablus, decided to work on a project, making a party for the orphans and the children of the refugee camps in our area. We planned many meetings and decided on the date we would hold a party. We hoped that nothing would happen and everything would be OK: no curfews, no attacks, etc. Unfortunately, just a few days before the party the assassination of Sheikh Ahmad Yassin occurred and the party was cancelled because of that.

We tried to reschedule but the assassination of Dr. Abd El Aziz Al-Rantisi occurred a few days later and the plans were unfortunately postponed indefinitely. It is unfortunate that while at the seminar in Ramallah we felt we had the power to make positive changes, the horrible situation we are in prevents us from doing so. We live for the day that we can

plan the project that we would like to have.

I have hope that it will come and I believe that once we feel the justice, the freedom and the equality, then peace will spread out over all of the people.



Credit: Jen Marlowe

Seeds take a break between sessions at the Grand Park hotel in Ramallah



# School Ties

Credit: Ned Lazarus



A discussion between a Palestinian Seed and an Israeli student during one of the first SOP school presentations

**I**n order to spread the message of Seeds of Peace, since 1997 Israeli and Palestinian Seeds have conducted joint presentations at schools throughout Israel and Palestine. Seeds who presented at their schools in Jerusalem and Haifa, as well as one of the audience members, reflect on the presentations and reactions.

## Explaining My Side

Tala el-Yousef (Jerusalem)



In the fall of 2003, I went to an Israeli school for a presentation about the Seeds of Peace organization. It was one of the most remarkable experiences in my life. It was the first time I had ever entered an Israeli school and it was very different from mine. During our presentation, we talked to the ninth-grade students. Our aim was to make them understand what Seeds of Peace is about and to make them realize that there is a possible solution for this endless conflict. We wanted them to know that this unrelenting conflict could end only if we make a true effort to end it. Before going to camp, I thought there was no place on Earth where you could feel that all people were equal and also thought that every place was filled with animosity and prejudice. But, I realized during my stay in Maine that WE can make it possible to reside in a place where it is safe, just as it was in camp. I know that we live in a world of ideals but we can make it happen. The presentation was to try to carry this message to these students.

Even though this presentation lasted for about an hour, I'm sure that we changed some of the people's perspectives and many became interested in applying to camp. Our aim was not to brainwash them, but what we really wanted to do was to make them realize that everything is possible and something can happen to alter the situation that we are living in and experiencing everyday. If we are willing to carry this message to all of the people in this country, then maybe a solution will be found and maybe this conflict will at last come to an end. People could relax without being afraid or tense about their future.

During our presentation we showed a documentary film about Seeds of Peace camp in Maine. The film was just to give them a taste about how everything goes on there, and who first established it. As soon as the film finished, the students started to ask us questions about Seeds of Peace. At first, they asked us general questions about camp, like how many nationalities come, but then they started asking us some more personal questions. One of these strikingly conspicuous inquiries was if I, as a Palestinian, face any predicaments or humiliation from my friends or family members because I am a member of the Seeds of Peace family. I answered that some of us cope with many hardships trying to convince others that what we are doing isn't wrong and is worthwhile. Some of the people that you approach may be persuaded, but you will also find

other types of people who stick to their ideas and aren't capable of changing their outlook. But I still have hope.

The Israeli students asked me, as a Palestinian, about my emotions when I'm in an Israeli part of the city. I started answering them about my daily life and told them that both sides of this conflict are suffering on the same scale, which is vast. In addition, I stated all the problems that we deal with in our lives such as checkpoints, curfews and the Annexation Wall that is being built. In addition, we talked about the current situation that we are experiencing in our own lives and we shared some personal stories that I believe elicited some emotional reactions. I believe we opened their eyes to the bloodshed that is taking place each day and opened their ears to hear the sobs of a homeless young child not knowing what to do with his life or where to go!

I hope that more of these school presentations will take place in Palestinian and Israeli schools. These presentations also helped me gain confidence in myself to talk in front of a big group and it was also helpful because it showed these students a Palestinian perspective in a very vivid way.

## Something to Think About

Yara Uwayyed (Jerusalem)



In October 2003, a wonderful presentation was done at my school, Rene Cassin, in Jerusalem. I started planning the presentation with two Seeds from my school and the Center staff over a period of a couple of weeks. After we finished planning we turned to talk to my school about doing the presentation. It was done on a Friday and five Palestinians arrived to my school with the Center staff with the shirts of SOP. I was so excited about the presentation but I was also worried about the reactions of the Israeli kids from my school. When we entered the room it was so quiet that you could have heard a pin drop. During the presentation I saw many eager faces to ask questions, and I was happy that I had a chance to bring Palestinians and Israeli non-Seeds together, even if it was for a couple of hours. During the presentation we had a slideshow with some pictures of camp; we tried to bring our experiences to the teenagers in our audience. After the presentation was done, many kids came up to me and to some Seeds to ask us questions about the organization and how to join. After that I felt really awesome. I was happy that I had the chance to change the mind of some of these teenagers. We gave them something worthwhile to think about and it felt really good.

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Credit: Ned Lazarus

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## Overwhelming but Important

Agam Rafaeli (Haifa)

My name is Agam Rafaeli. I am 16 years old and I attend the Hebrew Reali School in Haifa. My school is pretty old - it will celebrate its 90th birthday this year - and has suffered over 250 casualties in the present conflict. Having this grave history, my school is known for its militaristic nature and its right-wing policies. One indicator of this is that in my classes, we have a few cadets who study in the pre-military academy. Having this kind of orientation, my school presentation had an odd color. I and the other five seeds in my grade, Paul Roit, Roni Balagula, Shahar Mendelovitch and Ella Coren, set up a slide show describing camp and other activities SOP has done for us in the region and internationally. For about 45 minutes we spoke to them about making friendships, about crossing un-crossed lines and understanding things that were not yet known to us. As a group we spoke about how we have changed, what we have learned and the unique experience SOP has been for us. Following this long talk we allowed the students to ask questions. The reality my friends and I live in was put face to face with the reality the Arab Israelis which came to the presentation live in. Accusations were made, explanations were given and to me it just seemed like a big coexistence session. Topping it off were the people who asked private questions of the presenters. I think that anybody present was overwhelmed a bit but everyone also took it all in and thought it over. I think that this was an amazing chance to pass on the Seeds of Peace idea and it was a huge success.



Credit: Ned Lazarus

Seeds describe the organization's activities to interested high-schoolers



Credit: Ned Lazarus

Seeds outside an Israeli school in Katzir

## An Israeli Military Cadet's Perspective

Interview with Itai Martziyano, a military cadet present at a Haifa school presentation

Agam Rafaeli (Haifa)

*Hello, Itai, would you introduce yourself please.* My name is Itai Martziyano and I am 16 years old. I live in Ma'alot which is a small city in the northern part of the Galilee. Today I don't live at home but spend the week at the military academy in Haifa. I study at the Hebrew Reali School like all the other cadets at the academy. As a cadet I learn Israel's history, both military and cultural. Together with the rest of my platoon I am trained to become part of the future array of officers in Israel's army.

*What was your impression before the presentation at the school?*

I know a few Arabs who work with my father. I always knew that peace was a mutual goal, though now after I got to meet some teenagers who think and speak like me the objective seemed a whole lot closer than usual.

*What was the one thing that rattled you during the presentation?*

At one point one of the kids in my grade asked one of the Arabs if he thought that bombings are a legitimate tool. One of the Palestinian Seeds answered that he thinks that defending one's home is always legitimate. He asked us, the Jewish Israelis, what we would have done if our home was in peril. I have been thinking of this ever since.

*When the presentation ended I saw you hugging one of the Arab Seeds. How did your peer cadets take that?*

My peer cadets couldn't figure out how I, a right-winger, could hug an Arab. I just told them that I realized the conflict was something that hovers above and that the personal matter is the important thing. But this Palestinian Seed was a person whom I respected for his opinions and as such he is the same as any one of us.



# Egypt and Jordan: Welcome Back!

**T**his past year, Seeds of Peace has undertaken efforts to re-establish its presence in Egypt and Jordan. While Egyptian and Jordanian Seeds come to the annual camp, they now participate in regional follow-up programs such as school presentations and group seminars.

## Presenting . . . Seeds of Peace

Farah al-Kayed (Amman)

When Center staff member Genny Adel came to Jordan, I was so excited that a counselor from camp planned to come to see us in Jordan! And I didn't hesitate about going. I read the email she sent, went crazy and canceled all my plans just to see her!

The first meeting was inspiring since Genny told us she is coming back and that Jordanian Seeds are going to start some activities here. The major topic in that meeting was the presentation we were going to make in front of people about Seeds of Peace, so the Seeds who were interested offered to take part in that presentation. Those interested were myself and my fellow Jordanian Seeds: Dana, Mo, Raya, Hani and Ehab. We had several meetings before the presentation, and we planned what each one was going to say, and awaited the big day.

Honestly, I didn't sleep that night thinking about the presentation. Butterflies in my stomach kept me up all night. There were many questions floating in my mind but the main question was, "Will people be interested in applying to be campers at Seeds of Peace?" I mean, are we going to be good enough to encourage them to go?

The big day came, I got dressed and ran to the Radisson Hotel, where the presentation was, and made sure that I was well prepared. When I got there, I noticed that I wasn't the only one who was nervous! We kept jumping around until the hall was totally full, we sat and then one after another started presenting! At the end I forced my companions to come up and sing the SOP song for the audience, and one member of the audience, a former Seed, joined us!

Words can't describe how happy I was when Genny asked if anybody would be interested in applying for camp and there were so many hands up - people who were really excited to go! Late that night I sat on my bed and did the usual thing I do every night - I wrote in my diary. I wrote, "It is the first time in my life that I feel I have done something for the people who gave me hope and showed me that the world can be a better place!" Till today, whenever I think of camp, I can't help crying because it's the only place where I felt relieved about the future and promised me that one day that peace which is soaring above, will land at last. Thank you SOP - for making the world a better place.



Jordanian Seeds Aaya, Raya, Dana, Hani, Mohammad, Farah, Rawan and Ehab

## Spreading the Message from Cairo to Alexandria

Mostafa Sallam (Cairo)

Until recently, Egyptian Seeds haven't had a major role following camp in Maine. But this year that has changed. Now, the Egyptian delegation is beginning to contribute something back to Seeds of Peace. This year, there were presentations for the very first time to international schools in Cairo and Alexandria, to future Seeds of Peace campers. I took part in two of these: One at The Modern English School (MES) and the American School in Alexandria (ASA).

The one that took place at MES was the most vital one, since it was the first of its kind in Egypt. And believe me when I say this, it isn't easy talking to people about the value of peace in times when war is stirring. Teachers told us that there were numerous students who wanted to go to this camp of amity and tolerance. We started by telling the future campers about the daily routines of camp and what to expect when they get there. They were a tad shy about asking questions at first but then after hearing personal accounts from fellow Seeds Sherien and Sherief, who had accompanied me, they started asking what it felt like sitting with the "enemy" and the experiences that we Seeds had gone through. Seeing how the future campers were thankful for our presentation, I wouldn't mind doing a hundred more.





Credit: Sami Ammous

Overlooking the Dead Sea

A few days later I was on a train heading for Alexandria, located 300 km to the north of Cairo. With me were Seeds Hatim, Yassin, Ragia and of course, Jerusalem's finest, Jared and Genny. Upon our arrival we were surprised to know that the school's media class wanted to interview us before we presented our talk. They were extremely moved by our experiences with the "enemy" and asked us numerous questions, like if we think that peace is really possible and what was camp all about. After we were done with our interviewers, we went to talk about camp to the students who showed up. It was an experience that one has to see for himself in order to understand its satisfaction.

Generally, the two presentations were an overall success and hopefully there will be more to follow. It is good to know that now Egyptians Seeds will play a vital role - in their country and the Middle East - not only at camp, but throughout the year.

## Impressive Activities for a New Start

Raya al-Halawani (Amman)

I participated in the presentations that took place in Amman in February and April and they were quite good. When I signed up for taking part in this presentation, I was a bit nervous but at the same time happy and proud. I was going to present in the name of the organization which positively changed my way of seeing others' perspective, as well as improved my coexistence and listening skills.

*These activities, helped us, the Seeds... unite and discuss the future of Seeds of Peace in Amman*

The presentation was pretty impressive. As we included all the topics concerning the camp, we focused on the coexistence sessions in addition to the various activities we used to do. I felt as if I was there; I remembered everything. This was amazing, especially because I haven't participated in any coexistence activities since camp, because I had to come here to Jordan with my family, from my former home in Jerusalem. Despite the unstable situation going on in the area, the attendance was good during our first presentation.

Two days after the presentation we went to the Dead Sea. It was extremely exhilarating - we played and swam for the whole day. It was exciting and the weather was superb.

It was really great to do some activities here in Jordan, and I hope they will increase. These activities helped us, the Seeds, to meet and unite to discuss some different issues concerning the activities in Jordan and the Arab Seeds, and the future of Seeds of Peace in Amman.



Credit: Sami Ammous

Usama Salama and Jordanian Seeds relaxing at the Marriott Dead Sea resort



# Afghanistan: Reconstructing Lives

**D**uring the first half of 2004, Afghan Seeds have participated in programs that have brought them together to discuss their past, present and future. Seeds taught and learned, and shared their memories and their hopes for a peaceful Afghanistan.

## Realizing the Dream

**Ahmad "Hemmat" Shah (Kabul)**

I am thankful for what Seeds of Peace has given me. Being in war, growing in war, learning from war, being away from peace and at last becoming hopeless and disappointed of peace - these are not strange and new things for Afghan teenagers. All Afghan teens have grown up not only in war, but through several kinds of disasters and difficulties like illiteracy, poverty, indigence and humiliation. Lots of Afghan teenagers are still disappointed about their future and their country, and they need to change, but we, Afghan Seeds, are lucky and different; we have the chance to discuss these types of problems with teens from more than 22 countries and now we can decide what to do. At the Seeds of Peace camp in 2003, we had more experience to overcome such kinds of



**Mir, Najia and Shabnam at work**

problems, and I feel luckier than other Afghan teens, having had the chance to think not only of war, but of peace and how to create it. I feel I am accountable for helping other teenagers.

Seeds of Peace was the world of my dreams, and it is the only shoulder for war-ravaged countries to cry on. I believe in Seeds of Peace and appreciate what it has provided me with: HOPE. After attending the SOP international camp, I was able to discuss important issues

with friends, troubleshoot and overcome problems in my family, class and society; now I am hopeful about my future, my country and peace in the world. I have strongly decided to give these feelings and ideas to every Afghan teen. I do not feel alone or weak. I know we can do much, but we have to work hard and we will show the results of this work to the people of the world. Before the collapse of the Taliban regime in my country, I thought that the fight against war and terror was impossible; but now I am sure that WAR and TERROR have no more life in the world. We have to redirect human passions from negative goals toward SOP goals: to create peace and brotherhood among the nations of the world. The recent Loya Jerga (great council assembly) and elections are making the people of Afghanistan hopeful about peace and democracy in their country. I wish all the dreams of the people in my country come true. These developments make me optimistic about peace in Afghanistan.

I believe in the power of peace and unity in the world.

## Doing my J-O-B

**Khabir Sallah (Ghazni)**

I have done very great things to promote Seeds of Peace in Afghanistan. I went twice to my hometown, a village which is in Ghazni province of Afghanistan and far from Kabul. I've shared my experiences and ideas with illiterate people of this village. They came to agree with me and gave me very nice support with lots of love. They told me that they were proud of me and that I am the future of our country, and that made me so happy. Recently, I held a four-hour workshop with students of my village and brought together six classmates of mine who know a lot about SOP - together we prepared a workshop for 150 students of our school. I will continue my work in Kabul and also in the provinces and villages of Afghanistan.

## Building Leadership Skills

**Mir Akhgar (Kabul)**

Holding SOP workshops in Kabul was a new experience for us Afghan Seeds. All of us Seeds worked very hard for two days in Kabul with Seeds of Peace staff members Jen, Marieke, David and Noor. The points we covered during the workshop were coexistence, behaving and communicating manners. It was especially useful for me, and a fun part



**Meditating before a long day's work**

of it was about commercials. We were told to create a commercial to "advertise" peace. In our group, we thought up a commercial, in which we expressed peace and justice: when there is justice in a society there will be peace as well. Following the commercials we discussed the problems of our country, such as why we had a war for a long time and why we didn't have patience with each other and why we couldn't think up solutions for all of these problems. This workshop helped me to find solutions very easily, because I learned to understand the origins of problems in our society. I used to only understand the problems but I didn't know from where these problems emanated; but one workshop helped me to understand the sources of our problems too.

During the second workshop, we wrote about a mental or physical scar that



affected us. For most of the Seeds, it was the first time that we wrote something from bad memories from our lives, but it was a good experience to do so. Some of us wrote very powerfully, and I learned about the bad experiences of my fellow Seeds and I realized that there is nobody in Afghanistan who was saved from the torture of the long war in my country.

The next day focused on photography. Three visitors ran a digital photography workshop; they were photographers who told us how to use a digital camera for taking pictures. In groups containing five seeds, two staff members and one camera, we went to different damaged sites in Kabul. My group was lucky. We went to Daru-ul-Aman, which I hadn't been before. We spent the day taking very nice pictures and seeing once more the marks of 25 years of war. The benefit for me was to see a place I had been interested in seeing but hadn't before.

This workshop was managed by us, the Seeds, but supervised by the staff. It helped all of us learn how to start a workshop and how to manage it. For me, it gave me a better sense of how to implement my hopes for the future.



Haseeb, Wahid, Matiullah, Abida and Sapna debate solutions

## A Scar in My Life

### Parnian Nazary (Kabul)

*During a workshop exercise, Parnian wrote the following about her struggles in Afghanistan*

In 1992, Afghanistan was taken by the Mojahedeen. After the takeover, some unknown people came to our neighbor's house and they jumped above the wall to our house. They wanted to take our



Parnian discusses obstacles to peace and how to overcome them

car. Fortunately, my cousin was in our house and saw them. My cousin made noise. My father went out and he chased away the thieves. When the other neighbors informed the Mojahedeen, the thieves were arrested but after seven days they were freed from jail.

They came to our house again. My father wasn't home and they said, "We'll take revenge." We were really scared. Our neighbors helped us. They stayed awake with my father for three nights on the roof. Finally, my father decided to leave Afghanistan so he obtained Russian passports for the family. Our flight was through Pakistan, but unfortunately thieves stole the bike in which our passports were, as well as my mother's precious jewelry and all our money, too. Just \$200 was left in a suitcase that my father brought from Germany many years ago.

When we arrived in Pakistan, my mother's cousin was there. He took us to a friend's house, then we found a house for rent in Hayat Abad. Life was really difficult because after having a very comfortable life in Afghanistan we faced material and intellectual issues. However, my father went back to Afghanistan and he brought money. There were no jobs available for Afghans so he began a carpet shop.

After two or three months, we had responses to our request for going abroad. One was in Australia where my father's best friend was and the other from Canada, where my aunt was. We were

in Peshawar and because of the warm weather, my brothers had pimples on their faces, necks and bodies. My mother took them to the doctor, but when they returned, their car was in an accident and fell down into a dry river. My mother's spinal column was broken, so she couldn't walk or stand. My older brother was four years old and suffered from a bad shock. He couldn't remember or say anything. The accident caused a lot of problems. It was a bad scar in my life and my family's life. I'll never forget it. The day of my mother's accident, my father came home with the good news that we were going to Canada. My mother wasn't home when he got there. We told him the story and we all cried. The thing I won't forget is my father's tears coming from his eyes. My father had never cried before and it was the first time in my life I had seen him do so. I knew how hard my mother's accident was on him. After that, our flight from Pakistan to Canada was cancelled and we were in Pakistan for four years. My sisters went to university in Afghanistan and we returned there in 1996, after my grandmother's death. After having about seven or eight months of a good life in Afghanistan, troubles came to us again. The Taliban entered. They closed schools for girls and had very bad laws. The closing of the schools was like another scar on my heart. I loved school and studying. Five years of the Taliban was a black mark on the history of Afghanistan, just as it was on my father's heart.



# Cyprus: An Island Still Divided

**O**n April 30, Greek Cypriot voters rejected the United Nations-sponsored plan by Secretary-General Kofi Annan to unite their island. Seeds from both the north and south of the island react to the decision that keeps their island divided; they hope for a day when they can easily visit friends on both sides of the island.

## We Don't Seem to Care Anymore

**Natalia Kouhartsiouk (Geroskipou)**

A famous Greek poet once wrote:  
*"For some people there comes a day  
when they have to say that important 'Yes'  
or that important 'No'.  
Then you can see clearly  
who had the word 'Yes' inside him,  
and once he speaks that word he takes  
the road to honor and self-assuredness.  
The one who says 'No' never regrets it.  
If he was asked once more, he would still  
say 'No'.  
Yet that 'No' - that 'right' - knocks him down  
for the rest of his life."*  
(1901)

A great part of the Greek Cypriots did say "no" to the Annan Plan. And I suppose if they were asked once more, they would still say "no," again and again and again. I do not like the fact that we said no and the Turkish Cypriots said yes. That shows the real, ugly face people hide. I feel as if I have been living in a place where people do nothing but lie! I don't understand why for 30 years we have been asking for a solution, for an open door to go home; now, finally, there is someone who cares enough to point out a way to make it happen, and we just turn our backs and walk away. People insulted me and called me a traitor for saying yes to the Annan plan. I saw friendships being ruined because of different opinions and teachers encouraging students to say no. My school looks like a hooligan's place. Everywhere you turned there was a car and a house with a label on: YES, NO, YES, NO. I refuse to believe that even half of those who marched in the streets yelling really knew what the Annan plan was about. As I watched students blocking the main roads and writing with spray paint on the walls, I realized that

some people in this younger generation are no better than the ones 30 years ago.

They still carry those ideas that ruined us before. I was and still am disappointed. Now that everything is over I am trying to understand their way of thinking. I could only give one explanation: some of us do not care any more. I feel unable to do anything for my country. For the first time, I come face to face with what people want on this island. As I see it, the Greek Cypriot side refused to open a door for us, for the future. I am ashamed that I even heard Greek Cypriots say, "They should stay on that side and we should stay on our side, it's that simple!" or "I don't want them on our land!" I think that a simple word has given us a one-way ticket. I cannot see any reason why anyone would want to help us find another solution to our problem. I just hope that when we wake up and see what we have done to our country it won't be too late.

## The Annan Plan Explained

**Loizos Kapsalis (Nicosia)**

April 2004 was probably the most important month in the history of Cyprus in the last 30 years. The four-party talks finished in Switzerland; a proposal for a comprehensive solution to the Cyprus problem was drafted by UN Secretary-

General Kofi Annan; and referenda were held in the north and south of the island to accept it and Cyprus entered the European Union.

Had everything gone according to Mr. Annan's plan - that is, had both referenda been positive - the Republic of Cyprus, now controlled entirely by Greek Cypriots after the withdrawal of Turkish Cypriots in 1963, would turn into the Federal United Republic of Cyprus with Greek and Turkish Cypriot constituent states. It would enter the EU in this form, allowing for all Cypriots to be united and to prosper in the union.

Because of the negative result in the Greek Cypriot referendum, only the recognized Republic of Cyprus has entered the European Union, while the north remains a community only recognized as a country by Turkey. The results of the referenda were a paradox. The Greek Cypriot side, so far known to be the one actively pursuing a solution, responded negatively, while the Turkish Cypriot side, considered to have been the reason behind the collapse of previous attempts, responded positively. The results were not, however, unexpected.

The positive vote of the north reflects the will of Turkish Cypriots for reunification and entry into the EU. This has been reflected in massive demonstrations (more than 80,000 participants) during the last two years, and the change of leadership last year. The negative vote of the Greek Cypriots is more complicated to explain.

There were a good number of reasons to vote "yes." These included an end to the Cyprus problem; the return to their homes for a large number of refugees; the decrease in the number of Turkish soldiers and settlers; and the ability for Cypriots to control their country together in an EU promising prosperity and development. There was, however a



Turkish Cypriots march in a demonstration calling for reunification



different perspective: that the number of refugees returning and the number of soldiers and settlers leaving was very small and the time periods long; that the presence of the Turkish army would create a feeling of insecurity; and that the change in the way the government operates would bring political and economic instability - just one week before accession.

Greek Cypriots say that the accession gives them the ability to negotiate a better plan. They are having a hard time convincing the Turkish Cypriots and their EU counterparts that their "no" was not a "no" to a solution - but to this particular solution. Turkish Cypriots seem very disappointed and most believe that Greek Cypriots have betrayed them. The embargoes imposed by the EU on the community have been partially lifted as a reward for the positive attitude of the north and this gives them the opportunity to improve their shattered economy. But the question posed now is: What will happen in the future? We are effectively back to where we were before this round of discussions started. It is impossible that this was the last chance for a solution, as some warned before the referenda. It is, however, obvious that a lot of work needs to be done both on a political and personal level to reverse the negative stance in the south and the disappointment in the north. In this, Cypriot Seeds have a say. It is time that we roll up our sleeves and actively seek a solution to the problem.

## Unknown Future of Cyprus

### Resat Saban (Guzeylkurt)

A few years ago, I was chosen to be a camper for Seeds of Peace Camp, representing the Turkish Cypriot delegation. My political interest in Cyprus started with this event. Before the camp I had met with Greek Cypriots, but I hadn't talked with them about politics.

After a wonderful two weeks at the Seeds of Peace camp, with a lot of hopes in our hearts, we returned to Cyprus. When I got home I hadn't thought that



Cypriot Seeds in front of one of many checkpoints dividing their island

if I had the chance I would be able to see my friends again. But soon afterward we formed a Yahoo Group to contact each other about meetings and activities in Cyprus. Nearly one year later we met in Pyla, which is the only village where Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots are living together. Over a period of a year, we met about every two weeks. It became a routine. Two Sundays a month we met in Pyla and had fun. We organized a lot of activities together with my Greek Cypriot friends. We joined a bi-communal folk dance group. We met for Christmas and birthdays. When we were organising these kinds of activities, the Greek Cypriot political party AKEL and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) supported us. I thought that AKEL was the unique party in the South that supported reunification of Cyprus, like the CTP (a Turkish Cypriot political party) in the North.

It was really unbelievable to me when I heard the AKEL decision to say NO to the referendum on reunification. When I met with my friends in Pyla we always saw that there were representatives from the AKEL party. And I thought AKEL was a peace supporter in Cyprus. But we really don't know what the future will bring us. The question is in my mind right now is, "What makes AKEL do this?" Is it the USA and EU, or the inside politics of Greek Cypriots?

I think after the referendum we missed a chance to reach a final decision with

the Greek Cypriots. They said "NO" and Turkish Cypriots said "YES." And now the last word will come from the European Union Parliament. They have decided to admit a divided, not united Cyprus into the EU. I am so sorry. Cyprus is my motherland. I am not accepting this two-state idea.

## A Struggle to Stay in Touch

### Aylin Yardimci (Ankara)

Perhaps this is nothing new to most of you, and perhaps I am just being too emotional, but the three days that I spent in Cyprus a few months ago made me comprehend how distressing it can be to realize that sometimes even our friendships have to be manipulated by our governments.

Before my trip, I was indescribably excited about the idea of visiting Nicosia, and seeing all of my friends again. It was great to know that we were going to have fun, but it was heartbreaking to know that this fun would have to be limited because of boundaries. Because I am a Turk, I was not allowed to pass to the southern side, we all had to spend time in the north. No matter how much I wanted to see the area where my Greek Cypriot friends lived, I was not allowed to. It was not even possible for me to call them by dialing their country code +357. That probably must have been the ultimate stage of futility, I thought.

It was then that I realized that our countries were in fact manipulating our friendships and limiting our ways of communicating. As we tried hard to see each other, our governments also tried hard to separate us by setting various regulations. The ones who were supposed to be making peace were trying to stop the ones who were willing to do so.

This experience is what made me remember once more that we all have a challenging mission to accomplish. Despite all kinds of obstacles that we may be faced with, I still believe that the purity of our intentions and feelings have more power than any man-made barriers or stubborn governments.



# Balkans: From Darkness to Light

**I**n the wake of the violence that wracked Kosovo in March of 2004, Balkans Seeds still maintain hope for their region. Their May workshop in 2004 in Ohrid, Macedonia, showed just that: it brought Seeds of every ethnicity from Kosovo, Albania and Macedonia.

## Is There Still Hope For Us?

Jelena Trajkovic (Kosovo)

March 17: Demonstrations in Mitrovica started after Albanian TV showed that three boys died because of the Serbs. A couple of weeks later, KFOR (the NATO force in Kosovo) representatives at the press conference said that upon investigation, Serbs were not guilty for these deaths. But that was the reason why Albanians started demonstrating in all Kosovo towns. After a couple of hours it caused a lot of violence all over the Kosovo.

In Mitrovica, a town divided between Serbs and Albanians, Albanians wanted to pass the bridge that separates the two sides of town. During these events, two Serbs were killed and many of them were wounded. I was at the university in Mitrovica when I heard gunshots. There were calls on the radio for people to come and give blood in hospitals because there were many wounded people. After five years of trying to reach out, Serbs were a target for Albanians who wanted to undertake ethnic cleansing in Kosovo.

I called my parents in Kosovo to check how the situation was there. They told me that Albanians in big groups started burning Serbian houses and important buildings. They also burned churches, hospitals, a post office and my school.

I was so scared, so far away from my family who was holed up in their house. The hardest thing for me was when my mother called me; she told me that the most important thing was that I was OK. That night I was in

Mitrovica, I stared out the windows to see if something was happening. I called my parents every five minutes and every time they told me that somebody's house in my neighborhood was on fire.

The next two days were a worse nightmare. On March 18, my sisters went to my uncle's house in a Serbian village near Kosovo called Polje. On Friday, March 19, my parents had to leave our house. Albanian neighbors came and told them that they could not save them. When they left, they saw a huge group of Albanians burning Serbian houses on my street. They thought that it was the last time they would see their home. When I heard all of that, I started to cry. When somebody just mentioned the word "home" and their families, my hands started to tremble.

During the violence, many people left their homes and lost everything they had. Following the two days of violence, my Albanian neighbor called my parents and told them that our house was not burned; our house was either too close

to his, or he talked with the Albanians who were torching the homes and convinced them not to touch our house. We still don't know.

During all this I asked myself if there is hope for a better future. But everyday somebody from the Seeds of Peace office called me and I knew that I had friends all around the world who actually cared. I was away from my parents, but I wasn't alone. Seeds of Peace supported me. Yes—there is hope for a better future here in Kosovo. I just hope that these events won't happen again.

## The New Beginning

Gent Salihu (Pristina)

Riots spread all around the country over two tragic days in Kosovo, March 17 and 18. While the riots developed throughout Kosovo I was in school. Those two days made me think of terrible years past, full of stress and hatred. Following the murder of three Albanian children, over 2,000 NATO reinforcements were deployed to

support the existing 18,500 KFOR (the NATO-led force) troops and 10,000 United Nations personnel and local police in Kosovo to maintain stability.

During these two days in March, 18 Kosovar citizens were killed. Hundreds of others were injured or wounded. Peace, which had seemed nearly a reality over the past five years, shattered in the moments when the riots started to spread. It is difficult to achieve again what was "built" during five years after the war. All that had been achieved collapsed in just two days.



Credit: Gent Salihu

A Kosovar boy hands flowers to KFOR Soldiers





The Balkan workshop in Ohrid gathered Seeds of every ethnicity from Albania, Kosovo and Macedonia

The demonstrations that happened in Kosova were not without reason. The economy is underdeveloped, unemployment is increasing, the country has old and impractical laws and highways are commonly blockaded. But with the killing of these children, riots broke out and were followed with destroying and burning houses and religious buildings by a group of hooligans who don't value the future of my country.

Many people in my country say, "Better to be a dog in Sweden than a human being in Kosova." The first impression for everyone who comes to Kosova would be exactly this one. When you see the streets, there is poverty everywhere: children work in the streets, crying and ignored, beggars look for help and people suffer from the pollution. People live for "today" and wait for a better "tomorrow."

Kosovar and international media are never focused on the day-to-day problems that people face in the Balkans. Throughout those ethnic clashes in March, Kosova continued struggling to get on its feet, trying to meet standards set by the international community for the future of our country.

These disconcerting happenings that occurred were just six days before the fifth anniversary of the entrance of NATO troops. After the situation became calmer, thousands of people gathered in Prishtina to commemorate the day the air strikes started. During the riots teachers kept us inside our schools for fear that something bad would happen to us, but a week later, we, together with our teachers, held support slogans in our hands and walked toward KFOR soldiers.

Kosovar President Ibrahim Rugova called for people to remember March 24 as "one of the most important dates of Kosova's history." People remembered when

NATO/KFOR came to spread peace in Kosova and throughout the Balkans. Children were giving flowers to KFOR soldiers. They were grateful for the politeness of Kosovar citizens.

There is always hope for Kosovars and this shows when we see billboards written during 24 March: "Days of hope - The new beginning,"

### Appreciating Diversity

#### Arlind Mucaku (Tirana)

It's difficult to accurately describe the workshop organized in Ohrid, Macedonia. Everyone who was part of the workshop should be proud of himself. The workshop was special in every respect. Two dozen youth, of every ethnicity from Kosovo, Macedonia and Albania came, which was a first in many years of Seeds of Peace activities here. Starting with the location: Ohrid is a town located in the heart of the Balkans. We all had the chance to visit and to have a small tour. Everyone was fascinated. The town is old and modern at the same time. The nature is fully protected, the lake is striking and the architecture tells more than everything about the history of Ohrid. The Ohrid castle is enormous and from it one has an awesome view of the whole town. It stayed in my mind and I'll never forget

it. Another great aspect of the town is religion. When you see the mosque and the church near each other the religious tolerance is obvious.

During the workshop, the group leaders, Chris, Sonja, Andy and Scott, helped us a lot. Their effective and successful activities influenced our minds for good and made us reflect. Although hesitant and shy, over the course of the workshop we began to express ourselves. We started to tell something about our past, our experiences. We talked about the violence in Kosovo in March. We started to understand each other. We started to be more tolerant and to respect some conversation rules. We all developed great communication skills. We made plans on how to continue meeting in the Balkans and how to take more responsibility in planning events and activities.

The best part of the workshop was introducing our countries and nations, although it included a lot of debate and observations. This session contained great cultural diversity. We learned a lot about symbols, religion, lifestyles, culture, traditions, history, language and finally, the future of our countries. The last day we had enough free time to choose different activities to do. Some of us talked about Seeds of Peace and its role in our lives and future. Some of us watched a

fantastic film about Kosovo and the ethnic groups living there and how cooperation between them had begun.

The workshop was too short and the end arrived very quickly. Everyone shared email addresses, phone numbers and different ways to keep in touch. We returned to our communities. As I think back, I realized we planted the seeds of peace and love and are now better qualified ambassadors who can connect our countries.



Participants explore ethnic and national identity through an image theatre activity



# India and Pakistan: Peace on the Horizon?

**R**ecent Indo-Pakistani political dialogue, along with some amazing cricket matches, has given Indians and Pakistanis hope for peace. Seeds in the region continue to realize this hope, and hold leadership workshops, enjoy cricket and analyze the media that negatively portrays their neighbors.

## Promoting Cooperation in Lahore

Andrew John (Lahore)

To revive the camp spirit after returning to our homelands, and to properly do our J-O-B, Seeds of Peace arranged many post-camp follow-up programs in India and Pakistan. This April, we held a workshop with Seeds staff members Andy and Sonja, a marvelous event where we spent two and a half days learning. We learned a variety of skills that would help us carry out our mission more effectively. The participants arranged a sort of a "mini-workshop" themselves, without the aid of the facilitators, to give the other Seeds a taste of what we had been doing. During the workshop, we were taught about communication through body language and eye contact, and through a series of effective coordination exercises we were able to get our message across to our partners without speaking. Then, we had other similar exercises where we had to act as a group to promote



Pakistani Seeds participating in Get-To-Know-You activities

teamwork, confidence building and understanding. We were also taught how to be a leader and a follower at the same time and also how important it is to be a good listener as well as a good speaker. We also analyzed how different images may depict different messages and be interpreted differently by different people.

The workshop on the whole was a really fantastic and memorable experience for all of us. The hard work and efforts of Andy and Sonja are commendable. The best part of this workshop was that everyone felt comfortable with everyone else and every Seed participated. Everyone participated; no one felt reserved. The workshop was really a great learning experience for all of us.

## Camp Away From Camp

Shanoor Seervai (Mumbai)

"Karjat is amazing. You'll have so much fun there, it is unbelievable." These words of a fellow Seed echoed in my mind as I sat on the train to Karjat, a small town approximately three hours away from our city of Bombay. Eleven of us were about to participate in a Seeds of Peace leadership seminar.

I expected to enjoy myself, but nothing prepared me for what I was about to learn. We began the workshop by sharing stories of our own experiences at camp - funny stories and memories of frustration, warmth and understanding.

In one of many activities, we got a glimpse of being a leader when we led another person around a room, guiding him by placing our palm a few inches away from his face. It was the duty of the leader to take his follower on a safe but exciting journey within the four walls of the room. It was challenging to take responsibility for just one individual; but it was correspondingly difficult to blindly obey another. A leader is not chosen to generate fear and abuse power. He is powerful because of the implicit trust he receives. To use this trust to harm and stifle his followers is not leadership; it is tyranny. As Seeds, we all have the opportunity to be leaders. We have been through an experience that millions of other people branded as 'impossible' -

and it is up to us to change 'impossible' into reality. We can use our experience to guide people away from hatred and toward the beginnings of acceptance. But how could we change people's minds without making them feel as if we are preaching?

We discussed various tactics we could use to spread the message of peace with originality in interactive, humorous sessions. We divided into two groups to plan our own presentations or workshops, which we could use in our own schools and colleges. My group prepared a workshop based on prejudice. We were unsure of whether we should bring up the topic of the Indo-Pakistani conflict with a group of students whose opinions we had never heard before. We decided to use activities that involved teamwork to help familiarize our audience with each other, but we worried that they might not want to share their inborn prejudices with others. Then we planned to proceed to a discussion about the deep roots of prejudices, which have been ingrained in our society for years.

That weekend I felt rejuvenated, and realized that people would listen to what I had to say if I said it well enough. In those two days we all gained even more confidence to spread a message that we believe in: the message of universal peace and brotherhood. It was only a weekend away from the harsh bustle of the city but those two days felt like camp away from camp.

## Cricket: The Test of Coexistence

Janeen Madan (Mumbai)

Early this year, the Indian Prime Minister and the Pakistani President sat across a table at the SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) summit held in Pakistan and discussed some of the issues that divide our two





Credit: Andy Arsham

Indian Seeds building trust between themselves

nations. The two leaders have agreed to discuss ties that bind - such as trade, travel and cultural exchange - and make these a kind of protective cocoon from where delicate issues such as Kashmir can be resolved.

Of course these talks between our leaders are of the utmost importance to the ongoing peace process. However, there is something more important that has occurred. In March, the Indian cricket team went on an exclusive tour of Pakistan. Indians flocked to buy air and train tickets to all the matches there.

As many as 1500 Indian cricket fans crossed the border to watch the matches in Lahore. The Indians who visited Pakistan were overwhelmed by the warm welcome they received. Indian celebrities who were interviewed on television said

that they were astonished at the Pakistani hospitality. Indians were presented with bouquets of flowers and special arrangements were made for them to travel into the city. Everyone was filled with hope for the improvement in relations between the people of our two countries.

The cricket matches began with millions of people drawn to their radio sets and television screens. I had my exams going on at that time, but my friends and I couldn't help but close our books and sit with our eyes glued to the television screens. Business men stayed home from work, children sat in their classrooms waiting anxiously to know the score and families on the streets crowded around a single radio set. Every match was played with a tremendous competitive spirit and had us all sitting at the edge of our seats awaiting the result of the nail-biting finish.

For once it seemed like we didn't need politicians and government officials to bring hope to our people: they had discovered the possibility of peace and friendship themselves. These cricket matches have kindled close relations between two "enemy" nations at a crucial time of the peace process. As a great cricket fan myself the only regret I have is that I was unable to travel to Pakistan

and witness the great atmosphere that pervaded the cricket stadiums during these special matches!

## The Black Magic of Bollywood

### Siddarth Shah (Mumbai)

Ever since the grand saga of movies began in India in the 1920's, movies have been depicting the true vitality and compassionate values of the Indian tradition. However, over the last seven to eight years many of these movies have acquired a new dimension - an anti-Pakistani one.

In the movie *Border*, some soldiers brutally shoot a few tribesmen upon learning that they are Pakistani and on the Indian side of the Line of Control (LoC). In another movie called *Agnipankh*, some of the Indian POW's are shown undergoing severe harassment in enemy territory; before they finally run away they are shot at the LoC. There are several other examples of such demeaning movies like *LOC - Kargil*, *Deewar* and others.

By showing Indian soldiers being killed by their Pakistani counterparts and then showing the "hero" killing hordes of the enemy soldiers, such films have changed the mindset of the people, especially those who are illiterate and more susceptible. Such films tend to create a sense of enmity and hatred against the Pakistani people. (A survey conducted by the 2003 Indian Seeds aptly proves that.)

Now, however, the atmosphere between the two countries has become hopeful and peaceful. Peace can be accomplished only if the people of both countries themselves root out the feelings of hatred, but these movies are preventing this from happening.

Cinema is a preacher and a teacher. It is painful to note that now the film industry has become a money-making factory. Film producers pay very little or no attention to the ethical side of the picture. Cinema can work miracles if both the producers and government embark upon producing films that present moral and artistic ideals.



Credit: <http://www.worldaffairsboard.com>

Pakistani cricket fans cheer for their team against India



# United States: Grappling with Diversity

**H**ow do Seeds in the US approach demographic changes and different cultures? Both Lewiston, Maine and Detroit, Michigan have diverse populations. Seeds from these cities explain how they and their communities respond and adapt.

## The New Face in Town

**Tchotcho Teko  
(Lewiston)**



My name is Tchotcho Teko and I live in Lewiston. I'm writing in The Olive Branch to share my feelings about being an immigrant living in Lewiston. You might not think it's a big deal, but many months ago Lewiston went through a change. Somalians arrived. When more of them started coming, the people in Lewiston started talking about how the Somalians were taking over, and how they seemed to be richer than the rest of the people in Lewiston. I didn't think it was such a big deal, but it became one. Rallies took place and a group of white supremacists came to our town. They were racist and didn't like the Somalians. I started thinking more and more about that event. I kept thinking that this was the way the town thought about me, my family and the rest of the African immigrants in Lewiston.

I got kind of scared. I went to school one day and as I was walking past a group of students, I heard them talk about how they hated the Somalians and how it wasn't fair that they had nicer cars than their parents, since they had been in Lewiston longer than the Somalians had. I wanted to say something to the students. I wanted to tell them that the Somalians worked for their money just like my family did when we came here. It wasn't like the government gave us new cars or anything like that. We worked for our money. Since we have been in Lewiston my parents have been working their butts off to pay for the house and to supply us with food

and clothing. I realized how close-minded these kids were to different people, to new things. Even some of my friends started talk badly about the Somalians, and that is when I told them that the Somalians worked for their money so they can do whatever they wanted with it.

A few months later there was a peace rally at Bates College which I attended. When I went there I saw a lot of people, my white neighbors, and that made me feel more comfortable living in Lewiston. Since the rally, Lewiston has changed. People here have become more open-minded to a new culture, a new people and I feel that there has been more diversity. And I like this change. I don't have to go to school anymore wondering if people like me because of my race. I have made so many friends and I have my best friend, Sarah, to thank for that. (She's a Lewiston seed too.) I think if people open their minds to different things they get smarter and they are not afraid or jealous of other people.

## The Changing Face of Lewiston

**Sarah Pelletier (Lewiston)**

In Lewiston and Portland, in Maine, we have a new cultural population, immigrants from Somalia. While many cities welcomed new populations, my city, Lewiston, poorly handled the situation. One mayor sent out a letter, and some say it included incorrect information about the situation. People began to feel like the Somalians were taking over. It was kind of like the cities went into depression.

Honestly, I was in shock at first when I saw all the Somalians coming to Lewiston. I felt like they were taking over too. But then I thought to myself: I go to Seeds of Peace. I realized that I had friends

who were Somalians at camp and they are just like me! So then I took back all the negative things I had said and turned them into positive things. At camp we did talk quite a bit about the situation. Our discussions went on for a long time, especially during our co-existence sessions. Sometimes it was so hard to talk about the city I live in and everything that was happening. At one point, I couldn't take it anymore, I was so bummed out. I felt like Lewiston was a horrible place and that everyone hated it and I just felt bad myself for living

*Seeds is helping the community by letting it know that someone is out there who understands*

here. But then again, Lewiston is almost like every other city if you think about it. When you are in camp, everyone treats everyone the same. At least, that's what I have seen.

After we returned home from camp, we continued discussing the issues of immigration, integration and how to deal with a new population. Every other Sunday or so, we have local meetings and a little while back, we often talked about how to solve the "problem." We came up with a few ideas. One was, if people talk about the topic and say bad stuff or wrong information, just wait until they are done and state what you know is true about what's happening and knock some sense into them - that Somalians are just like us. I really feel like Seeds of Peace has influenced me and many other people to realize what has happened in





Miriam and friends at Seeds of Peace Camp in Maine

Lewiston and Portland. I know for sure we as individuals look at situations differently but we are around the same phenomenon. Seeds is helping the community by letting it know that someone is out there who understands.

## Achieving Peace in America

Miriam Liebman (Detroit)

It was a fairly calm February morning when I and three other Jewish friends of mine drove to Dearborn, Michigan. Being early for a culture sharing day, we thought we would look for a place to grab a quick bite to eat. The Detroit area has the largest Arabic-speaking community in the United States. Dearborn has the largest Arab population within the metro Detroit area. We walked into two restaurants and after finally realizing that we were lacking Arabic proficiency, we decided to buy quick munchies at a gas station nearby. Driving down the street in Dearborn, it is easy to believe you are driving through the Middle East. The irony is that not even half an hour from where we were,

there was a kosher grocery store, kosher restaurants, kosher bakeries and a synagogue on just about every corner. At my school to be a white Christian is to be in the minority. Chaldeans (Christians originally coming from Iraq), Jews, Indians and Pakistanis seem to dominate. But even with this much diversity, an issue as simple as having

***We too are at war. Our war, however, is not fought with suicide bombs and checkpoints. Our war is a war of silence***

former Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres and Dr. Sari Nusseibeh, the current president of Al-Quds University, speaking at a Seeds of Peace gala leaves my community at what seems to be the brink of war.

Arab protestors stood outside the gala calling Peres a terrorist. Threats were

given to some Arabs who chose to attend the event. Before giving a presentation at my school, phone calls and letters were received by my principal from members of the Jewish community objecting to the idea of having a Seeds presentation. It is not a taught hatred toward the Arabs, it is an ingrained love for Israel. After returning home from my first summer at camp, I remember talking to a friend of mine who had just returned from an Orthodox, Jewish girls' summer program. After hours of discussion and argument, I looked at her and asked, "Have you ever met an Arab?" She looked me in the eye and said "No."

We too are at war. Our war, however, is not fought with suicide bombs and checkpoints. Our war is a war of silence. We have each been spoiled by our respective communities deafening us to the opinions of others. I, however, refuse to sit idly by and watch the two communities clash with each other day after day. I am fighting my own war, a war to break the silence existing between us. For Israel and the Arabs to achieve peace is an unfair expectation if we have not truly achieved peace here.



# Friends in the Fold



Credit: Jen Marlowe

Soad and Daria lead an ice-breaker activity

**I**n late April 2004, Soad Haj Yehyia, an Arab Seed from Taibeh, and Daria Ratiner, a Jewish Seed from Holon, organized a Bring-a-Friend event for Seeds and their friends. It was entirely their own initiative and both they and their friends thought it was a success.

## Soad Haj Yehyia (Taibeh) and Daria Ratiner (Holon)

To meet non-Seeds friends from both the Israeli Arab and Jewish sector is not an easy task. We, Soad, and Daria, decided to take the risk and make the day unforgettable for our friends, so we organized a meeting for them. We worked hard to make this day really amazing and successful. At the Center in Jerusalem we do a number of activities, but both of us thought we could do Seeds of Peace activities outside the Center as well.

In March, we met twice to prepare the event, and Jen from the Center helped us a lot. The event was at Beit Berl near Kfar Sava, close to both Taibeh and to Holon. We each brought about six friends who were not in Seeds.

At first we were so afraid to fail and we had a lot of fears! But Jen always supported us and encouraged us. When we arrived with our friends, we first ate lunch. It was good to eat before the beginning of the activity because we sat together and everyone's friends got along from the start.

After lunch, we entered the activity room and saw that our friends were very happy to be with each other. Both of us laughed because we started to see the results even before any activities. During the first activity, we got to know each other through introductions. The time passed too quickly. During the second activity, we arranged ourselves in a circle, and inside the circle there was another circle. A person from the inner circle would ask a question of someone in the outer circle and with every new question, the inner circle would turn. We asked about six questions, and they were pretty tough. When the inner circle had gone

all the way around, the activity finished, but the friends wanted to continue playing. We were very surprised. After that we had the main activity, which was an open discussion. We were afraid that there would be a lot of fights, but to tell the truth we were amazed and happy that no problems occurred. After the open discussion we finished the program, which took about two hours.

We can't express our feelings - when we finished the day successfully and went out to go home, our friends didn't want

that the girls and boys in front of me were just like me, they have - exactly like me - big dreams, ambitions and opinions. We are exactly the same, although, the only difference between us is religion. I saw that they have a great desire for peace and for a common life, exactly as I have. I saw that just like me, they have complaints about their government. The connection between us continued after the meeting. I talked with Muhammad and Nasreen (friends of Soad) just like I talked with my Israeli friends. We tried to find a day when we can meet again, and I believe it will happen really soon.

Peace will come on a day when we won't just talk or not talk at all. It will come on a day when we will talk and act, on that day peace will really come. You need just to try and see. I want to thank everyone who took part in the event especially to Daria, Soad, and Jen.

## Nasreen Massarwe (Taibeh)

Even if the activity wasn't something new for me, the people at the Bring-a-Friend made it more exciting for the whole group.

When Soad came and told me that we are going to meet some Jewish people, I accepted the idea, but I wasn't so convinced it would be useful. But since the moment we arrived, I realized this meeting would be the first in a series of great meetings.

We talked a lot about what we love, hate and think - even things that we want to change in our lives. Then I understood that there's no difference between us, except the languages and the religion, and never mind those because we can make it through together.

My last comment for Seeds of Peace: I ask you to organize, as much as you can, more wonderful meetings like this one.



Credit: Jen Marlowe

Arab and Jewish friends participate in a dialogue session

to go home. They exchanged numbers and addresses to each other. We felt Jen was so proud to have Seeds like us! We are planning to make this meeting the beginning of many more meetings. This is only the beginning.

## Dor Shabtay (Holon)

Hello everybody, I am Dor Shabtay from Holon, and on Saturday, April 24, I took part in a Seeds of Peace event at Beit Berl.

I had no fear in my heart; I only had a great desire to listen to other opinions and to express my own. And that's how it really was. I wasn't surprised to find



# Planting Seeds in Taibeh

**I**n Taibeh, an Arab village in northern Israel, Amani Jaber is trying to create a youth cultural center in her town. Working with fellow Seeds, Center staff and the mayor, she is in the process of building a space that will offer the people of her town a safe space to learn and play.

## Amani Jaber (Taibeh)

*"We haven't just inherited the earth from our forefathers, our society continues to borrow its endowments from our children."*  
Louis James

Those children who are identified in this quote are us Seeds, who work for this society and earth.

Seeds from Taibeh have raised an idea of starting a youth cultural center for non-Seed students in our town. The center will be a place where students can spend their free time after school and be active for their town. It'll be based on the combination of Seeds of Peace principles and the future of our town, Taibeh. The first steps toward the future of this project were taken already when Seed Rami Tibi, Center staff member Jared Willis, and me met with the mayor of our town, Salah Jbara. In the meeting we proposed our desired project. The mayor gave us his full approval to develop our ideas and use the local stadium or a local school as a temporary center.

We have planned that the center will welcome students in grades seven through nine, and will have activities such as soccer, frisbee, art classes, dialogue groups, leadership sessions, presentations, handball, volleyball, activities for parents and language courses. We will also try to teach the students about the importance of media in publicizing our center and activities. The local center will have a strong connection with Seeds of Peace, and will be a place to prepare new Seeds from Taibeh before they travel to the camp in Maine, and a place to choose student representatives of Taibeh who will be called the

*It'll be based on the combination of Seeds of Peace principles and the future of our town, Taibeh*

"Taibeh Committee." This committee will inform others on progress (on the Seeds of Peace front) that occurs in case they had to be in a meeting out of Taibeh. They also will do the organizational work of the Seeds meetings in the town.

After our meeting with the mayor, a

meeting was held at my house to further discuss the project. What we came up with in this meeting was that we will try to meet with the headmaster of the A'mal Technological High School. We will propose our project to him and try to get his approval to use his school as a center in the afternoons. Our choice for this school in particular is based on its location in the town center, being safe and well-guarded and possessing the classrooms and space we need. It is a place that parents will agree to send their children to, unlike the stadium area, which is less safe. The meeting with the headmaster will take place soon. After the meeting, if we get the agreement from the principal, we will meet again and assign jobs and committee members. After that we will present the exact plan to the mayor so he can approve it. Then we will be ready to go and publish advertisements in town.

It is important to mention that the staff who will work at this local center will be us, the Taibeh seeds. And if there will need to be adults or professionals in certain fields, then we will make the effort to have those people. At first, the center will be open once a week, and then we can increase the meetings as we measure our project success.

The center will have a journal where we will record what will be going on during our work sessions. We also will work to involve the media in order to spread the word about our center on television and the radio, so we can have the opportunity to tell people about our work in the region and the center's goal: to strengthen Seeds of Peace principles and work for the future of our town.



Credit: Bobbie Gottschalk

Amani in front of Taibeh's famous bridge



# Seeds on Both Sides of the Checkpoint

**W**hat is it like to pass a checkpoint? What is it like to guard a checkpoint? Israeli and Palestinian Seeds find themselves on both sides of the barrier and recount the inconvenience, discomfort and humiliation

## A Daily Routine

Abeer Assouli  
(Jerusalem)



Last week, I read an article about being 16 in Italy. At the beginning, I was interested and happy to know about the way other people my age live but later on I realized that there's a huge difference between their type of life and ours. In Italy, people my age can move freely without anything stopping them from continuing on their way. This is the direct opposite of what happens over here in Palestine where you can't cross a few kilometers without finding a checkpoint and humiliating soldiers.

As a Palestinian student who lives in Al-Ram - which is situated exactly between two main checkpoints, the first on the way to Ramallah and the other one on the way to Jerusalem (where my school is, in Beit Hanina in East Jerusalem) - it's really difficult for me to reach school. Most days I leave my house at about 6:30 AM so that I don't catch the traffic going to the checkpoint. Without the existence of that checkpoint, it would take me less than 10 minutes to get there; that's what most of my classmates do and they leave a couple of minutes before the first bell rings. In addition to having to leave early, I usually face the problem of the closed checkpoint, and getting through depends on the mood of the soldiers. As a result, I miss so many days of school and even if I can pass the checkpoint, I go to school on foot because I can't find any transportation. Moreover, the checkpoints prevent me from hanging out with my friends, which is not a normal situation for people my age, who always look

forward to having fun.

Most of my teachers who come from the West Bank cities such as Ramallah and Bethlehem sleep at school. They can't go back home everyday after school because that would take them an uncountable number of hours. They see their families once a week - on Saturdays - and return on Sunday. It would be impossible for them to reach school on Monday if they left on the same day.

Soldiers at checkpoints interrupt the teachers' privacy and ours too. At the checkpoint they open our bags and take everything out of them, even the books. I remember one day when I met my Arabic teacher who was awaiting her turn to pass through the checkpoint. She had a sack full of exam papers. When it was her turn, the soldier took all the papers out and mixed them all together so that she'd spend more time putting them back in order. I remember another teacher entering class and crying because she was taken to be investigated by some soldiers who caught her in Beit Hanina (an Arab neighborhood in Jerusalem); it was forbidden for her to be there because she has a green West Bank ID, and not a blue Jerusalem one. She had to sign a document and promise not to come back to that area. She didn't return until the principal got involved and tried her best to get her a permit. Another example is my own father who often doesn't go to work because

of the curfew and the closed checkpoints. Although he couldn't reach his office because of the situation, the manager would consider him absent on that day, and that affects his salary and income at the end of the month.

While the checkpoints affect my life, I do have an easier time crossing them since I hold a blue Jerusalem ID card (as opposed to the green Palestinian West Bank ID card). However, the Israelis have begun building the separation wall, so nobody knows what is in store for us. I consider myself lucky because I have a blue ID card. The Palestinians with the green ID card, who need a permit every time they come into Israel, have the worst time and deserve our sympathy and support.



Credit: Seth Wilkas

Cars line up to cross the Kalandia checkpoint north of Jerusalem.



## A Night at the Gush Etzion Checkpoint

Eldad Levy  
(Kiryat Gat)

There are a few minutes left for me. I am still lacing up my boots. On my way out I put a pack of chocolate into one of the outer pockets of my overalls. I get my gun and grasp my vest. I get out of the caravan and enter the cold, typical of Gush Etzion in January. The other four soldiers are already waiting for me by the Jeep - it would be better if I hurry up since the soldiers at the checkpoint have been posted there for eight hours.

"A light security check," was the instruction from the division commander, and we get in the Jeep. I am in the back, as always, the youngest of the group.

In my thoughts, I disconnect myself, as I think about the blue skies and distant clouds that I see outside of the armored window. We travel between the clouds



on our way outside of the settlement. I hear a loud noise and see orange lights.

"Answer the radio!" someone shouts at me.

From the same dream, about my Shabbat vacation, I return directly to the operations room via the radio.

"Keshet here, Palace."

"Roger. Over, Palace."

"Location?"

I hesitate since I don't know exactly where we are, but the Jeep commander turns around and throws me a line, "We're almost there, we have just passed Scotland."

"We are passing Scotland."

"Roger. Over and out."

Scotland, eh? How nice it is to give a codeword to the place we are traveling in, green hills, small stone houses, olive trees, houses with red roofs and green, blossoming gardens - I am only able to think about how much a pity it is on the place I am living.

We finally get to our destination and take our positions, the commander receives a short location briefing from the outgoing commander.

Omer to watch with the mag.

Hagai to the small soldiers' barracks.

Lior, Shai and me at our positions.

The wind begins to chill and the sky to gray. An old, cream-colored Subaru nears us. Shai guards and I motion to the car to stop. The car slows down and I begin to step to the side. A light rain falls on my helmet and a chill wind blows against my face.

The procedural matters: ID? To where? From where? When? What's in the car? Open the glovebox. And likewise, car after car . . .

The time is not passing and it's already getting dark, we get a thermos with hot tea, which is nice before night falls.

A young man from the village of A-Dir forgot where he put his ID, who knows how long he will have to stay here. There is no time to think about this because other cars want to pass.

The commander decides to remove the passengers of the taxi coming from Jerusalem. It is very cold but they have to. I help an elderly man with a red

kafiyyeh get out, we check the car up and down, inside and out. We ask the passengers an infinite number of questions. Lucky for us our intelligence officer speaks a little Arabic. To myself, I wish the passengers luck. Finally, they pass and the rain gets stronger, I am dripping water. There really isn't much reason to wear a hat, now, is there?

My nose is getting red and it's running, the weapon's metal is cold and the vest is heavy, the food is late and when it arrives it will probably be cold and dry. Hagai succeeds in getting the broken radio from the previous watch to work. A little music, good.

A short phone call home and one from my girlfriend. Neither can understand how eight hours have passed and I'm still on watch.

"Dress warm and take your medicine."

"Watch yourself and be very careful."

"I'll tape the Maccabi game for you."

Sounds from home - until the commander yells and I return to my position. A brown car comes.

The passengers want to get out and among them is a little boy. He doesn't take his eyes off me. Why? I am dying to ask him where he's come from and where he's going. But his eyes are sharp and serious. Finally they pass the checkpoint, but a minute before he returns to the car I put my hand in my pocket - Palestinian, Israeli, Arab, Jewish - everyone loves chocolate, that's an international fact!

The pack of chocolate stays in my hand until the boy finally decides to take it. I am still not sure, but I think I succeeded in making him smile.

The hours pass, dawn breaks and the second watch comes to replace us. Thank god. One of the settlers from Efrat tells me that in this area there are lots of deer, and that I should pay attention - maybe something nice before the end of the watch? We get onto the Jeep and leave.

The next day the Jeep bringing the second watch is attacked by gunshots from the adjacent village. My group talks about attacks on Jeeps and staying alive, and I'm thinking about how to make a Palestinian boy of eight smile.



# Tragedy in the Gaza Strip

**B**etween a suggested disengagement plan and Israeli military operations in Rafah, the Gaza Strip has received tremendous press coverage over the past few months. A Palestinian Seed describes his long return home to Gaza, two others about the destruction of their neighborhoods, and an Israeli Seed remembers a friend, a soldier killed by explosives in the southern Gaza Strip.

## Home at Last

**Mohamad Matar  
(Nusseirat)**

I got to Gaza FINALLY after a 9-day trip since I left the states. I was transferred from the Cairo Airport to the border with Gaza because I didn't have a visa to enter Egypt. As I arrived to the Egyptian side of the Rafah Entrance to the Strip, I found out that the border had been closed for the whole day. I had to stay there for seven more days until the border opened. I slept on a dirty floor for seven days with no cover along with ill people who just had surgeries in Egypt, including an old man who had open heart surgery. I was with tens of little children crying constantly of exhaustion and hunger. I had so many chats with old people who live in refugee camps, and heard many of their stories. I had the chance to help old women out when they needed someone to move their luggage. I spoke to the Egyptian kids operating the tiny cafeteria and knew what kind of people pass through that border everyday. Every night, people would go out of the waiting room where we slept to watch the F-16 shelling of Rafah and watch the dust in the air created by redeployed tanks in the region, about a quarter of a mile away from us. Every time a missile hit a target, an old woman that was with us would cry and shout. She was from Rafah, but never knew if her house was still standing, never knew if any of her kids, husband, or relatives were still alive. You can't imagine the disappointment that appeared on peoples' faces as they cracked their bones every morning after sleeping on the floor when they discovered that the border was still closed.



Their tiny piece of hope remained for the next morning until they ran out of hope at the end. I haven't had such an experience before, but I am glad I was forced to live through it.

When the Israelis opened the gate seven days later, I was taken to a private room in the back of the passport inspection room on the Israeli side of the border. I was investigated and questioned by an Israeli Intelligence Officer. He was amazed by the fact that I spoke English well and went to good schools in the US, given the fact that I was raised in a refugee camp in Gaza. I mentioned SOP as an answer to one of his questions. "I haven't talked to a person like you for a very long time. I wish Israel had young people like you," he said. "If we do, then I haven't met any of them yet. I will tell my children and grandchildren that I met you."

## Please Save My City

**Numan Zourob (Rafah)**

*This is taken from a posting to the Seeds of Peace Listserve on May 19, 2004*

I am Numan Zourob, a member of Seeds of Peace from 1995. I am studying medicine in Spain, but I am from Rafah, which was destroyed by the Israeli army. Military Operation Rainbow, began this week against my city, a small crowded one in the south of Gaza Strip that has about 70,000 habitants and one small hospital. This operation aims to end supposed arm traffic from Egypt to Gaza Strip.

A lot of people left their own homes, and without their homes they can go nowhere except the street, and if one of them has a little of luck he may find a place in one of the U.N. schools. People left their homes, the only place they felt safe and secure; they did not just see their homes being destroyed, but also their

dreams of having an independent state, of having freedom, of feeling secure and safe in their own land.

The Israeli army says that this operation is being done to stop the traffic of arms, but I wonder if this is the goal, then why do they enter in the city and destroy everything? Why did they destroy the Tel al-Sultan neighborhood, a very crowded zone in Rafah? Why did they kill innocent people? We are not dogs, we are not criminals, we are not a disease that must be finished by any way, we are human beings, we have feelings, we have the same right as any other person to live in peace and security.

I left Rafah in 1999 and since then I could not go back until December of 2003, and I swear that the city was completely changed. There were a lot of destroyed homes, a lot of sadness, a lot

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***I will keep praying for no  
more victims on any side,  
and I will keep praying  
that my city Rafah will  
not be destroyed***

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of poverty, and I think that these days this city is in a worse situation. Dear friends, Israeli people have the right to live in their own state in peace and security and the Palestinian people also have the same right to build their own state and have freedom. I dream of the day that Palestinian children can go to school without being afraid, in the day that workers can work and re-establish our home, the day that a Palestinian mother can leave her children and she is sure that she is going to give them a kiss at night before going to sleep, till



that day, I will keep praying for no more victims on any side, and I will keep praying that my city Rafah will not be destroyed.

## No Escape

**Mahmoud al-Ashi**  
(Gaza City)

*This is taken from a posting to the Seeds of Peace Listserve on May 21, 2004*



The Israeli troops and a lot of tanks are sieging Palestinian homes in the Tal Al Sultan area in Rafah. They have been striking the citizens and sieging the homes for three days. Most of those homes are full of children of ages who can't bear the situation without milk, water and electricity. Fifty six people were killed and the number is getting larger. The troops are striking every moving body. Even if the leaf of a tree moves, they strike it. Somebody went this morning on the roof of his home holding a bottle to bring water for his children, and a soldier shot him. The situation is very hard. The troops are preventing ambulances and even the Red Cross groups from reaching the area.

Some people here in Gaza City have relatives living in Rafah. They can't know what happened to them. In the night, Israeli troops tried to get inside the Al Zaitoon area. Tanks sieged the homes of that area, and they were supplied and helped by the military planes which began striking the homes with a lot of rockets whose sounds were being heard by me and my family members including the children who got very scared. The people were sleeping inside their homes. The soldiers struck the electricity power supplies of that area and made the citizens and children stay inside their homes while demolishing the homes beside them and they even demolished the home of a person whose family members were prevented from getting outside it before the demolishing process.

On the same night at exactly 2:30 AM, I was sleeping as were all of my family

members. I heard some loud sound striking a home 50 meters from mine. The sound was horrible. After a moment, a second rocket struck the same home and a while later, a third one struck as well. Like every family member, I got very scared. A lot of ambulances quickly turned onto our street but they were far away until the striking process of the rockets was finished. Actually, I went outside after the first rocket strike to see what happened. I watched the second rocket coming toward the same home very fast with a very loud sound, then I ran away while I was scared and got quickly inside my home. It was really horrible. Fifteen people were killed in this process alone. I am crying while telling you this sad news.

I need peace to prevail, but only after we receive our rights and dignity. If any one of you has questions for me, I am ready to give you real answers.

## Remembering a Friend

**Roy Cohen**  
(Ashdod)



With life in the Middle East the way it is, the great majority of the people that can try to keep themselves as remote as possible from the desperation. Since I live in a city in central Israel, and serve in the army without a weapon, on an urban military base, I need not try too hard to block out the turmoil. That is, until a certain explosion in Rafah was so big, it hurt my soul.

Aviv Hakani, posthumously awarded the rank Captain, was an old friend of mine. I looked up to him as a teenager.

He was two years above me in the youth movement I was a part of, the scouts. Ever since eighth grade, he was a counselor, an educator, a senior partner in establishing an alternative reality for our city's kids and a person from whom I learned and drew support.

After he started his military service, I

seldom met him in our rather cozy city. He took a different path from mine and chose to be a fighter, believing his greatest contribution to be on that route. He died while he was trying to locate and destroy tunnels through which weapons and explosives are being smuggled from the Egyptian side of the border with Israel. His mother said at his funeral, exhausted and weeping, that he died like the hero he was.

*An old friend dies in a terribly unprecedented way, and I demonstrate against the circumstances that got him there*

As if trying to prove us we haven't seen everything yet, the death Aviv experienced was awful. There was so much explosive material in his armored vehicle that it took two days to find pieces of the body. Even though a tiny piece of him was buried, his ten year old sister insisted on looking at the coffin in order to make sure his height was accurately depicted.

On the day Israeli soldiers found traces of his body I went to demonstrate against the Israeli presence in Gaza. And that's the inner and outer world, served on a bloody tray. An old friend dies in a terribly unprecedented way, and I demonstrate against the circumstances that got him there. To some people here it seemed like a way of saying his death was in vain, and that infuriated them. The sad truth is that they might be right. Aviv died defending his country, in circumstances that were inevitable at the present time - but I feel that this present is a deception that was brought upon by mendacity, by lying on both sides, by leaders that don't deserve that title in the face of the reality in which we live.



# Peace Initiatives:

**O**ver the past year, a number of joint Israeli-Palestinian peace initiatives have made their way into Israeli-Palestinian dialogue. Two in particular have gained prominence: the Geneva Initiative, founded by Yossi Beilin and Yasser Abed Rabbo, and the People's Voice, founded by Ami Ayalon and Sari Nusseibeh. To get a better picture of these initiatives, The Olive Branch interviewed both Dr. Beilin and Dr. Nusseibeh to discuss their initiatives and the conflict in general.

**Sagi Ganot  
(Holon)**

**Olive Branch**

Dr. Beilin, thank you very much for agreeing to answer our questions. To begin, I would like you to describe in brief the Geneva Initiative and its principles.

**Yossi Beilin:** The Geneva Initiative is a detailed model for a permanent status agreement between Israel and the Palestinians which was drafted by a broad coalition of former and current officials from both sides.

**OB:** Who is leading the initiative on both sides?

**YB:** Yasser Abed Rabbo and myself initiated the negotiation and because of that we are identified with it. But there is no one individual who is leading this initiative on either side. It is a truly led and promoted by broad range of people from both sides, including politicians, intellectuals, civil servants, people who served in the past in the military establishment, writers and more. It is a civil-society initiative and civil society is leading it.

**OB:** Do you believe that in a time of national crisis, what many describe as a war on our existence, it is legitimate to, as many say, act "behind the backs" of the democratically-elected government and negotiate with our enemy?

**YB:** First of all, no one acted "behind the back" of anyone. Although our work did not receive much press over the course of the two and a half years that we worked on it, everyone who wanted to know about it knew about it, including the top levels of the political and military establishments in Israel. Second, we did not work in order to impose anything on anyone, and never claimed to have signed something that is binding for the official representatives of both nations. I said it more than once that what we did in Geneva was engage in a virtual



Yossi Beilin

exercise that can serve as a model for anyone wishing to enter negotiations on permanent status. In this respect, I believe that, rather than undermining any government, we offered our government a service. It can take up Geneva if and when it wishes. It can learn from Geneva, improve on Geneva, or even reject Geneva. Governments rarely have the time and resources to invest in what we did. What we did, and precisely because it was non-official, was a real gift to the Israeli government.

**OB:** Do you still believe a cooperation with the Palestinian leadership to formulate a just peace is possible, after the disappointment following the Oslo Process, the Camp David Talks and other attempts at bi-national negotiations?

**YB:** Yes, I do. The Palestinian leadership - meaning people like Abu Ala, Saeb Erakat, Abu Mazen, Dahlan - are pragmatic people. Great as the disappointments have been, the alternative - that is, of continued conflict and bloodshed - is far worse. So I think we need to get over our feelings of disappointment and do what we need to do. Both sides.

**OB:** Why is negotiating with a seemingly unstable partner preferable to unilateral disengagement?

**YB:** Precisely because our partner is unstable, what we need to do is to strengthen it rather than further weaken it. Acting unilaterally amounts to turning our backs on this unstable partner and strengthening the extremists. In fact, not only do I prefer an unstable partner to a stable enemy, but I actually believe that we can do a lot so that our partner is strengthened. People forget that we have something to do with the situation - that we, too, have out an "input," as it were; that our actions have consequences that impact directly on our partner. In fact, we have to move away from an "essentialist" perspective that deems our partner as essentially good or essentially bad, essentially unstable or weak. To a significant degree, we, Israelis, construct (or when it comes to Sharon, destruct)

our partner. We are powerful enough so that what we do bears directly on our partner's appeal on the Palestinian street, its ability to act, perform, etc.

**OB:** What would you tell our Palestinian readers, who feel that none of the major issues from their point of view (i.e. territories, Jerusalem and the refugee problem) has been fully solved?

**YB:** I don't think that anyone who looks at the issues pragmatically can make this claim. Obviously some people will be more attached to some issues (say, to refugees) than to others (say, territory). But taken as a package, the Geneva Initiative offers a very sensible solution to all of them. Of course, people are welcome to come and search for better solutions. Geneva is only a model, not the Bible or the Koran. Improvements are always welcome.

**OB:** Do you believe, after all is said and done, that the model described in the Geneva Accords is implementable?

**YB:** Too much has been said, too little done. The model described in Geneva can be implemented, and structures into itself mechanisms that will assist both sides in its implementation. But the sooner we start, the easier it will be. If we continue this way, there might not be a Palestinian partner left. And much depends again on the assistance of third parties.

**OB:** In conclusion, what do you foresee for the land between the Jordan and the Sea, twenty years from now?

**YB:** I hope I don't disappoint you if I tell you that I don't foresee any utopia. My vision is a very modest one, perhaps upsettingly "normal" for many. I just foresee two states living side by side and maintaining peaceful relations between them. Their economies are stable and affected by the usual trends in global markets. I hope they will be linked to a large trading block, perhaps the EU, and I imagine they will have considerable trade between them. In short, the usual stuff between nations. I have very low expectations, you see...

**OB:** Thank you again for this interview.



# A New Dawn on the Horizon?

## Manar Al Natsha (Hebron)

**OB:** Can you describe to us the People's Voice Initiative?

**Sari Nusseibeh:** It's a grass roots initiative, in the sense that we are



Sari Nusseibeh

trying to gain the support of people for a statement of principles that we hope that the two leaderships will negotiate. We want individuals to sign a half-page statement regarding a two state solution. We hope that through it create a public opinion in Israel and Palestine that will force itself on the political agenda. This initiative is not a partisan movement; we try to reach people from all parts from political structure both in Israel and Palestine. We have been going for a year and gathered so far about 200,000 Israeli signatures, and about 140,000 Palestinian signatures.

**OB:** How did the people react to the initiative?

**SN:** There were criticism and opposition to the initiative, but in spite of the criticism we have managed to become much stronger.

**OB:** You are known as the leading Palestinian advocate of peace with Israel; what do you think about the peace movement in Palestine?

**SN:** I believe the situation in Palestine cannot be judged by the same measurements that it's judged in Israel, because in Israel there is on one hand a government that is behind the occupation, and on the other hand there is the peace movement that is against that government. On the Palestinian side, we are against the occupation; therefore you can't distinguish between a group that wants peace and a group that doesn't want peace, and the majority of Palestinians want peace on the basis of a two states solution. We the Palestinians have not been successful in general in making the message that we want peace clear. We have mostly been governed by our emotions, feelings of anger and frustration, too much to be able to express our hope and desire for peace with Israel.

with the left wing is currently helpful, while the right wing is in power in the Israeli government, with the killing of civilians, assassinations, and building separation wall?

**SN:** If I didn't think so, there would be no point in having an initiative, because initiatives are political mechanisms by which we try to change political reality. The People's Voice initiative is well organized and has a very clear plan how to change this reality, by creating pressure on the upper corridors of the political systems in the Palestinian and Israeli community, in such a way as to make these leaderships reflect the will of the people and make them negotiate. The basic philosophy behind this initiative is that the people are the power behind any political change and are the source of legitimacy for any change.

**OB:** In October 2001 you recommended that the Palestinians give up the right of return to their 1948 homes in order to live in freedom. The People's Voice initiative also does not promise Palestinian right of return to Israel. Would you explain more about this statement?

**SN:** I believe that the Palestinians have the right of return to all Palestine and Israel. In addition to that right, Palestinians also have the right of independence, freedom, and statehood, and the pursuit of these two rights together is bound to make us unable to attain either, so the pursuit of the right of return as a priority over the other right will lead to non-fulfillment of either right. Therefore, I suggested that we seek the right of statehood, forgoing therefore the implementation of our right of return to Israel. This basically means that in so doing we therefore have to address the problem of the right of returning in the following manner:

First, seeking compensation; second, rehabilitation of the refugees wishing to return to the Palestinian state; and third, to seek ways in which to address their problems in their present countries of residence to allow them to have the choice and equal rights of either, staying in the country as equal citizens or coming to the Palestinian state. In conclusion, if we do this we attain the right of statehood,

freedom and independence, we attain a partial implement of the other right, right of return.

**OB:** After the outbreak of the second Intifada you stood against the prevailing Palestinian public opinion by refusing and condemning suicide bombings. Would you explain your statement about this?

**SN:** I believe that it's morally untenable to cause death by indiscriminately killing citizens, so I should never allow myself to lose my moral principle that the killing should not be done to my side and not to the other side. I cannot defend the killing of Palestinian civilians if I cannot - with the same measure - condemn the killing of Israeli citizens without distinguishing race, religion, gender or age. In addition to that, I don't see that the use of violence in any form, including suicide attacks, fulfills a positive political function. What we should be seeking is not to win over the other side, but to win the other side over. We can do this by using non-violent ways. After one year of coming out against suicide attacks many people, even the opposition, came to see our point of view, because by committing violent acts in response to Israeli incursion we actually serve the interest of the incursion, which is why therefore I call for extreme self restraint from the Palestinian side.

**OB:** Are you optimistic about the future? And do you have faith that a peaceful future can be created?

**SN:** Optimism and pessimism are passive state of the mind, if you are an onlooker. But for me as a Palestinian, I am not an observer but an actor. The Palestinians can influence the future, because the future can be determined according to our will. I have faith that a peaceful future will come, and the more people who share this faith in the existence of two states, such future will come about.

**These are only selections from the full interviews. To read the full interviews, please turn to <http://www.seedsofpeace.org/olivebranch>**



