

# THE OLIVE BRANCH

Youth Magazine of the Seeds of Peace Program | Volume V, Issue II | Spring 2001



## Around the World with Seeds of Peace

COEXISTENCE AND CONFLICT:  
BALKAN, CYPRIOT, AND  
ARAB-JEWISH EXPERIENCES

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ISRAELI AND PALESTINIAN YOUTH  
PHOTO GALLERY

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EXPRESS YOURSELF:  
INDEPENDENCE AND IDENTITY





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THE OLIVE BRANCH | Spring 2001 | Volume 5, Issue 2

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## THE OLIVE BRANCH

The Olive Branch is a quarterly youth magazine written and edited by youth from Albania, Bosnia, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Egypt, FYROM, Greece, Israel, Jordan, Kosovo, Morocco, the Palestinian Authority, Qatar, Romania, Tunisia, Turkey, Yemen, Yugoslavia and the United States, who are part of the Seeds of Peace program.

### THE OLIVE BRANCH Staff

Ned Lazarus, *Editor-in-Chief*

Larry Malm, Roy Sharone, Jared

Fishman, Jen Marlowe, *Editorial Staff*

### Contributing Writers & Artists

**Balkans:** Dzemila Helac, Iskra Klinkarova, Jelena Traskovic, Merrima Spahic, Miranda Katajazi, Mirkica Popovic, Mladen Pejicic, Nita Himaduna, Xenija Smoljanic, Zana Zeqiri.

**Cyprus:** Anna Pieridou, Cise Sakalli, Erdem Serifoglu, Kiki Papaioannou, Maria Morouti, Marios Spyrou, Melek Meray, Nikoletta Christou, Sevillay Kucuksu, Umut Aypar.

**Middle East:** Amitai Sawicki, Asad Hassonih, Asma' Ma'aloul, Avigail Shoham, Bushra Mukbil, Dina Jaber, Elad Shaffer, Eiman Abdel-Baki, Inbal Lebovitz, Inbal Shacked, Lana Mansour, Karen Karniol-Tambour, Lana Mansour, Liat Margalit, Liav Hertsmann, Lina Jarad, Ma'ayan Poleg, Mai Abuemara, Mariam Bazeed, Maya Vaks, Mona Bushnaq, Nidaa Nassar, Ofer Bar-El, Ramzi Abu Jazar, Rinat Gilad, Rita Konaev, Roy Cohen, Sara Khatib, Shereen Adel, Shorouk Swiety, Tal Karni, Tarek Arow, Waffa Takroori, Ya'ara Mann, Ya'el Nir, Zachi David, Zeina Aljalad.

**USA:** Britney Dupre, Chelsey Berlin, Fayeza Aziz, Hannah Lantos.

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### THE OLIVE BRANCH

c/o Seeds of Peace Center for Coexistence

P.O. Box 25045, Jerusalem 97300

Tel. 972-2-582-0222 Fax. 972-2-582-2221

Email: [olivebranch@seedsofpeace.org](mailto:olivebranch@seedsofpeace.org)

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## Seeds of Peace

John Wallach, *Founder and President*

Bobbie Gottschalk, *Executive Vice President*

Tim Wilson, *Vice President and Camp Director*

Barbara Zasloff, *Vice President*

Christine Covey, *Vice President*

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### Center for Coexistence Staff, Jerusalem

Adam Shapiro, *Director*

Ned Lazarus, *Program Director*

Huwaida Arraf, *Regional Coordinator*

Jared Fishman, *Regional Coordinator*

Jen Marlowe, *Regional Coordinator*

Larry Malm, *Regional Coordinator*

COVER PHOTOS, top to bottom: Seeds from Cyprus at the Presidential Palace during the workshop in Prague, Arab and Jewish Israeli Seeds finish up the 24 hour coexistence marathon, Seeds from the Balkans relax in an ancient amphitheatre on the island of Cyprus.



# 1 Letters

## Inspiration

### Friends From the Start

My name is Liav Hertsman and I'm a Seed from 1994. I wish to tell those who are a year or two removed from camp how important your camp friendships are. They are amazing, like no other friendships you will ever have, and you should do whatever you can to stay in touch. I know it is sometimes frustrating, to see international politics affecting your relationships with close friends. But I know that these friendships are worth it. During the seven years since camp I tried to keep in touch with Egyptian and Palestinian friends. Unfortunately, military service and distance disconnected me from most. But I just came back now from a weekend in Amsterdam with my best Seed friend, Tamer Nagy from Egypt. After years of not seeing each other, the meeting was beyond words. After seven years we still enjoy each other's company. Just imagine yourselves with your Seed friends in five years. I hope in the future we can meet as adults, Seeds from 1993 through 2000. As adults we could arrange it ourselves. So come on, all interested in keeping in touch, contact me. I can't stop accusing myself for not keeping in touch with Asel, who was a dear friend. I cherish his memory. If any people who know me read this, get in touch!

*All my love and support,  
Liav Hertsman (Tel-Aviv)*

### Remembering the Future

People of Peace, I received the Olive Branch and Asel's book yesterday. I was overcome with emotion by both. I never met Asel, but I am still deeply touched. Through my fellow Seeds I learned so much about Asel. I cried. It was sad and inspirational at the same time. It gave me a deeper understanding of what Seeds of Peace stands for, and how hard we must work for the future, our future!

I was also deeply moved by the Olive Branch. I read articles written by my friends. Some told stories I had never heard. I was shocked. Sometimes I get so caught up in my "everyday American" life that I forget I am part of something much larger; something that will last throughout it all. I am a Seed, a Seed of Peace! The Olive Branch reminded me how much we mean to the future of this world. I was also reminded of the friendships I made and the memories we shared.

*Love Always Your Friend,  
Chelsey Berlin (Maine)*

I got Asel's tribute a few days ago. I read each and every word of it, which made me feel spiritually connected to this distinctive individual. I have never felt this way before. I felt I had a friend, a very understanding one, comfortable with his words, peaceful by his looks, and loving to his friends. Knowing that he is dead now, I felt that I lost a source of hope. Someone who was a big supporter of all of us, who made us take the hardest steps in life, who made us believe in ourselves, and do what we think is right. I just keep looking at his face wishing that I had such a person in my life, even knowing that I may face pain later. I remember reading something he wrote, saying that we don't have the power to bring back the dead, but we are powerful enough to remember them. Thank you Asel.

*Sara Khatib (Amman)*

### Learning from the Loss

Throughout past months, my most distinct emotion has been grief. Many times, I have tried to look within me and understand what these horrors are doing to me. Impatience and confusion buried my understanding of how long it takes for the process of understanding to evolve. I have also found that I chose to ignore the external dangers in order to avoid fear, and that for some reason I cannot find anger in me.

My one reaction to all of this has been grief and mourning. I believe that when people die it does not matter anymore who is right, what caused it, and who is to blame, has grown much stronger. I am amazed at people's reactions to death. While they sit and discuss, argue and accuse I sit and think, "people are dying." The sides disappear and I just think about the grieving families, friends and neighbors. All over this piece of land, people are crying.

The moment this emotion struck me most intensely, was when I read Asel's book. I had never met Asel in my life. The only connection I have to him is the one of a fellow Seed. I read what everyone wrote about him, the things he said, and I saw the pictures of him. A person portrayed before me. He is gone. My heart ached like it had never before. When the ones who loved him cannot accept what happened to him, what do they do? What would my family do if it happened me?

As I read the tribute, I felt that I would have done anything to bring him back. To let Asel live his life the same way I want to. To still be here, not to be forced to leave this world. I felt that I would do anything to stop his family's pain, to relieve them, to comfort the people whose lives have been shadowed forever. I couldn't stop crying. I have never mourned like this in my life and I was mourning for a person I never knew. Mourning because, due to all this madness, Asel is a person I never will know.

*Avigail Shoham (Jerusalem)*

## The Secretary of State Washington

March 27, 2001

Dear John:

Thank you very much for your March 9 letter and for the two Seeds of Peace neckties. Seeds of Peace epitomizes the type of effort so desperately needed in the Middle East to bring Arabs and Israelis in contact with one another at a personal level.

Unfortunately the trust and understanding so effectively created by Seeds of Peace among Arab and Israeli teenagers is all too rare, as the past six months have clearly demonstrated. With the level of trust between Israel and the Palestinians badly frayed, both sides need to become convinced once again that they in fact have a partner in peace. The United States has urged Israel and the Palestinians to take steps to restore mutual confidence and reduce the cycle of violence, actions that we hope can lead to the resumption of a political process.

I was especially touched by the Tribute Book that you sent me honoring Asel Asleh. The revolution created in the minds of many Arab and Israeli teenage Seeds of Peace was made clear by the pieces written by Asel's Jewish-Israeli fellow Seeds about him. I believe it is fair to say that the conflict we are currently witnessing would not be taking place if both sides knew and understood each other the way that Asel and his fellow Seeds did.

Sincerely,



Colin L. Powell



# From the Editors

We are proud to present the most international issue of THE OLIVE BRANCH yet. We hope that every graduate of Seeds of Peace can take pride in finding that our way of building compassion, respect and understanding between “enemies,” begun by 40 Arab and Israeli youth in the summer of 1993, is now reaching hundreds of young people around the world. In this issue, Seeds of Peace from nine Balkan nations, both sides of Cyprus, and a diverse community within Seeds of Peace’s home state of Maine, USA, join the Arab and Israeli pioneers of the program as partners in preserving the relationships they began at camp, promoting a dialogue that develops as they grow. This edition documents the intensive coexistence work undertaken by Balkan Seeds in Cyprus (pp. 10-13), Cypriot Seeds in Prague (pp. 14-17), and the children of new immigrants and natives in Portland, Maine, throughout the year (p. 27).

This edition is also a salute to the courageous Arab and Israeli Seeds of Peace who struggle to see each other’s humanity against the relentless tide of violence that has hardened attitudes everywhere around them. In this issue, Israeli and Palestinian Seeds document the damage that conflict continues to inflict upon them and their communities (pp. 18-25). They declare once again that weapons will not conquer their minds, will not shake their knowledge that they, as all human beings, deserve to live in freedom and peace. Dozens of Arab and Jewish Seeds of Peace from Israel responded to the destruction of October 2000 by building better understanding between each other and their communities in the 2001 coexistence program at the Seeds of Peace Center in Jerusalem (pp. 6-9).

This OLIVE BRANCH confronts conflicts that divide different areas of the world; ironically, it highlights their common elements. The Arab-Israeli conflict, the Cyprus Problem, and the Balkan wars are each unique situations, produced by different circumstances. Still, the same basic problems of hate and dehumanization are a fundamental cause and result of all, and mutual understanding and respectful communication are fundamental necessities for resolving all.

Identity and independence are at the core of each conflict. Many groups still try to draw territorial borders that block out different identities, despite the reality that in the twenty-first century, people with different identities live on both sides of every border. Diversity is the rule in most countries today, not the exception. It can seem frightening to recognize that different peoples share the same land, but it is true all over the world.

Seeds of Peace recognizes that reality, and encourages young people to overcome their fear and discover the different identities and perspectives of the people who live right beside them. Seeds get to know each other first as individuals, building some trust and chemistry; that way it is no longer so scary to discuss their differences. The key is to understand how much more we share in common as human beings.

The Seeds of Peace staff around the world have been especially important in creating and organizing the workshops and activities that are celebrated in this Olive Branch. We dedicate this issue to all the people who have given years from their life to encourage youth from twenty different countries to identify themselves as peacemakers.

## Statement from John Wallach, Founder and President of Seeds of Peace

Dear Seeds,

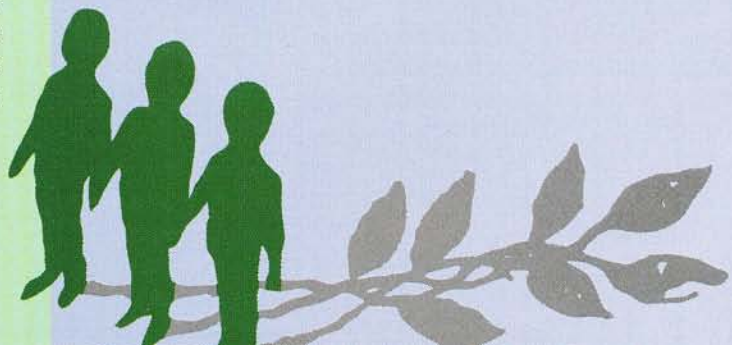
As you know better than I, since many of you are living the daily horror of warfare, this has been the most difficult period since Seeds of Peace began in 1993. Many people have written us off or would like us to disappear. As the American writer Mark Twain said when he read his obituary in the newspaper, “The reports of my death are premature.” Don’t write us off. Seeds of Peace will have two sessions of camp this summer and in the fall we will be preparing for our 10th anniversary reunion for all the Seeds who have ever participated.

Don’t write me off either. As many of you know, I am struggling against a deadly disease. I undergo chemotherapy treatments which are very tiring, but so far they seem to be working. I am getting better, appreciating every day of my life as a new gift from God. I cannot know my future, but let me reassure you: Seeds of Peace will survive.

I still believe coexistence is the only choice. Israelis and Palestinians are destined to live with one another, in states of their own, and to ultimately recognize their interdependence. It may take more years, and more tragically wasted lives, but I refuse to accept that your generation will suffer the same fate as your parents and grandparents. I believe in you. I believe in your ability, when this horrible cycle of violence dies down, to find ways to renew your friendships. Remember how you laughed when I said “Make one friend!” It seemed so easy then. Today it seems almost impossible to have a friend, even one friend, from the other side.

Seeds of Peace will not die. Indeed we are growing. For the first time this summer we will be welcoming delegations from India and Pakistan as well as from several countries in the Balkans and Cyprus. We are working closely with the appropriate authorities in Israel, Jordan and Egypt in hopes they will send delegations. It is unlikely that the Palestinians will send a delegation this summer although President Arafat has pledged his support for Seeds of Peace, continues to wear his Seeds pin, and has promised to reevaluate the situation if the violence ends and both sides return to the negotiating table.

So please do not give up. It is so easy to hate and so hard to keep hope in your heart. Think of what you were able to accomplish at Seeds of Peace. It may not have seemed important then, but you found a way to humanize the enemy, to see the other side as a person, as a human being who was entitled to the same things you want for yourself — a place to live where you will be safe and proud to call home, an identity that is recognized by the rest of the world, opportunities for advancing your education or becoming a doctor or teacher or dentist or whatever you dream of becoming. You earned the respect that each of you deserve for being the unique caring individual that you are. That is what we are fighting for. I will never give up. But neither can you. I still hope that I will see some of you this summer at camp and, if not, in the region when Janet and I travel there in the next few months. In the meantime, I send you all my love.





# Super seed!

by Yaara Ashkinazi (Karmiel)

It was an ordinary day...

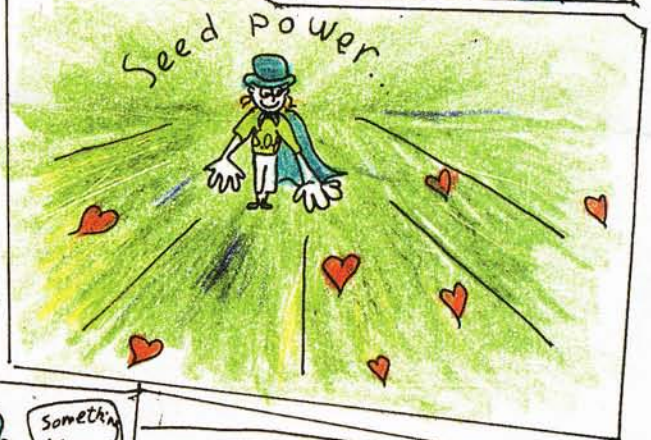


but then in class...



It's time for...

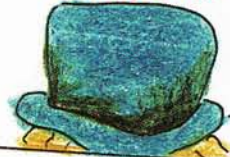
## Super seed!



## Supply check

100% Love    100% Brain    100% strength

0% hope



no hope?  
**NO**  
Problem!



## EVERY THING WILL BE O.K



# FACING THE

In the aftermath of the worst violence in years between Jews and Arabs inside Israel, forty Seeds of Peace formed coexistence groups that met throughout the year to try and understand what happened, why it happened, and how to create real coexistence in their future. The four groups met together every two weeks for intensive discussions of all the issues: identity, discrimination, rights and responsibilities, and violence. They built an understanding with each other, and then worked to spread the word to their friends, families, and communities.

## Achieving Understanding

By Tarek Arow (Jatt)

What did we do in the Arab-Jewish coexistence program? How could we make sense in the middle of all of the panic around us? Most important, did we achieve anything? Those are questions I asked myself before, during and after we started to “coexist.” At the beginning, I thought it would be useless because we had no Palestinians from the West Bank or Gaza, because of the situation. However, all of the Seeds in coexistence felt they must do something about the conflict, and that’s what brought us there.

The issue that most surprised the Jewish Israelis in my group was that many of the Arabs defined ourselves as “Palestinians living in Israel” or “Palestinian Israelis.” At first they tried to persuade us to call ourselves Arab-Israelis. Some of them said, “I’m more relaxed with the name Arab even if it’s without the word Israeli.” I stuck by my identity and they began to try to understand why I call myself Palestinian-Israeli, even though it upset them. I discovered that they had a fear of the word “Palestinian,” which, after I thought about it, was understandable. The name “Palestinian living in Israel” was new to them and they immediately connected the word “Palestinian” with the enemies of Israel. For them, having Palestinians living in Israel sounded like they have enemies living among them that want to sabotage Israel. This creates a lot of fear for them; both sides have a lot of fear in this conflict. Nevertheless, the Jews in my group ended up accepting my identity.

Then, the discussion of minority rights in Israel broke out. Some of the Jewish Israelis felt that because we do not fulfill our duty to the country by serving in the army, we cannot have

our full rights. However, we don’t want to join the army because we know that we might have to fight against our own people. We argued for a long time about whether rights come with duties or rights are deserved by everyone.

In these discussions, I discovered that there are Jewish Israelis that understand our problems, and the problems people are facing in the West Bank and Gaza. Many of them showed that they care about the situation of the Palestinians in Israel. This is very important because we cannot improve our position without the help of the Jewish Israelis. Some of them even agree with some of our points of view.

After those sessions I believe that we can still learn a lot about the other side, and we can solve some of the problems. This type of work together can prevent violence, like what happened in October. It seems that in all Seeds of Peace activities, even if we have a month, we always finish saying, “We need more time!” In what we do, that problem is understood, but I hope that one day we’ll meet and say we don’t need any more time because there is peace.

## Realities of Identities

By Ma’ayan Poleg (Kfar Saba)

This past year, since the start of the Intifada, has been horrible for me. When I came back from camp, I felt empowered. Power to change and make things better; I was proved wrong. No matter how much power I thought I had, I couldn’t stop the inevitable. Again, a wall was built between Israelis and Palestinians, between my friends and I. I felt like my power was taken away from me; I felt helpless. For a long time I had a big urge inside of me to do something, anything. That’s the reason I got so excited when I heard about the coexistence sessions that were being offered. I was too thrilled to even think about what they meant. Actually, thinking back to that time, I really didn’t understand the point of having coexistence sessions with Arab-Israelis. I knew there were problems between Israelis and Palestinian but I never imagined the depth of the conflict within Israel.



Group C's lively discussion at the Bring-a-Friend event.

Roy Sharon



# FUTURE TOGETHER

I came to the first coexistence meeting with no special expectations. I came thinking that we would probably be talking about the Palestinian-Israeli issue, and I thought it would be useless since we were not having Palestinians from the West bank or Gaza with us. I remember when we all sat in that first meeting, raising questions we had for the “other side”. The funny thing was that I had no questions to ask. I didn’t even understand there were two different sides involved, so I remained quiet for most of the meeting.

After our first meeting, I remember myself reading and watching the news in order to learn more about the conflict. Today I can say that my coexistence friends have taught me more than any source of journalism ever has. I am thankful for that. What was so amazing to me about our group was our ability to listen, understand and respect. Not once did we shout at each other or disrespect what an individual said. This created an environment that allowed us to feel free and to be honest with each other. This situation allowed us to discuss very hard issues, which I’ll introduce here.

Before coexistence, I would refer to Palestinian-Israelis, as Arab-Israelis. I do not remember the exact meeting when Diana declared herself a Palestinian-Israeli. She pointed out to the fact the Israelis are afraid to recognize Arabs of Israel as Palestinians. I came home after that meeting, and thought a lot about what Diana had said. I was amazed to find out she was right. We are afraid. Israelis have a hard time distinguishing between Palestinians from the West bank and Palestinians who live inside Israel. This leads to the feeling that we have our “enemy”, the Palestinians, living inside our country, and that makes us afraid. So we try to avoid the fact that Palestinian-Israelis are Palestinians, by removing the word Palestinian from their identity, and calling them Arab-Israelis. As funny as it sounds, it helps us deal with reality.

All the Jewish-Israelis in our group accepted the Arab-Israelis as Palestinian-Israelis; we even started to understand why they identify themselves as Palestinians. Our discussion about being a Palestinian-Israeli began after an exercise that dealt with identity. Naturally, the Jewish—Israelis defined themselves as Israelis. But most Palestinian-Israelis claimed to be Palestinians and Arabs first, and only some of them felt Israeli too. This frightened us a bit,

and we began asking questions like “Why don’t you feel Israeli?”. The reasons we discussed the most were rights and democracy. Israel is a Jewish country. That’s the reason Israel exists, to be a shelter for the Jews after all the suffering they experienced. Israel is also a democracy; a Jewish democratic country, but that makes whoever is not Jewish feel as someone who does not belong here. That’s what happened with the Palestinian-Israelis, who are not fully recognized by the government, nor by the people, and are often treated unfairly. How can we expect them to feel Israeli, when they are not even treated like Israelis?

The identity issue is connected to issues of the way police and soldiers have faced demonstrations by Palestinian-Israelis, another reason that they feel that they do not belong. When Palestinian-Israelis demonstrate the police and soldiers are harsher than they are to Jewish-Israelis. That is because Jewish-Israelis fear that they have an enemy in their country, so we “need” to treat them like an enemy to make us feel “protected.” Palestinian-Israelis demonstrate and protest against discrimination, to be equal citizens with equal rights, but we, the Jewish-Israelis, translate that as a statement of not wanting to be part of our country.

I focused on the issue of identity, because it is the most important thing I have learned from

coexistence, but it leads to a lot more. I can talk for ages about the things I’m taking with me from this group, and it goes beyond knowledge. There is no doubt that these coexistence sessions were one of the most important things I have participated in.



Larry Malm

Elvira, Danielle, Einab and Yaara get to business.



Kiyad Al-Jundi

Group D smiles with their friends from Bring-a-Friend.



Larry Malm

Group D builds a pyramid for the scavenger hunt.

*What we did was start building trust. People told stories not easy to tell. We started talking about the issues that really bother us. It felt good that everyone could say what they wanted and be heard. I felt like I could say what I wanted without being attacked. We’re starting to understand how these meetings are going to be and they won’t be easy, but we can try to understand.*

Yaara Sarussi (Jerusalem)



# GOING THE DISTANCE...

## Seeing for Ourselves: Akko and Arabeh After October

by Jen Marlowe (Olive Branch)

Every two weeks Arab and Jewish Seeds from Israel met. Sitting in a circle for hours, they discussed burning issues. Sometimes they shouted, interrupting each other. Sometimes they struggled to really listen. Rinat Gilad from Acco and Nidaa Nasser from Arabeh would often insist that if only the others could see with their own eyes what they were speaking about, they would finally understand.

In meetings, Rinat talked often about how the October riots inside Israel affected her home town. "I wanted the Seeds to see what was really important to me. Walking the streets they could see all of the people and their behavior," Rinat answered when asked why she wanted to bring the group there. "Acco is also a good environment for the group to visit because Jews and Arabs are friendly there."

Rinat spoke to the group about the effect of the October clashes on the town, especially the Old City, where we ate lunch in a hummus restaurant, toured ancient and holy sites and walked through the streets getting a feel for the



Group D and Asel's Siblings in Arrabe.

time I visited the mosque in the middle of the old quarter, it was full of people who were praying there. And now, I was the only one. I cannot pray alone. The Jews could not even go and look. It was sad."

According to Yoni Eizenberg from Karmiel, "It showed me how large the gap between Jews and Arabs really is. I know that it could be different in so many ways, and it was hard to see. But I understood it."

At the end of the trip, the group had time to talk about what they had seen. After the next meeting, Nidaa approached me. She wanted to bring the group to her village, so they could see and feel aspects of her experiences first-hand: "I wanted them to come to Arabeh because we always talk about inequality and I wanted them to see it and feel it, to understand why things are going the way they are."

The group agreed, and in time the Seeds were standing together in Nidaa's school. It left a deep impression on Rita Konaev from Afula: "Hearing Nidaa speak in coexistence I could hear the depression in her voice and her feeling of being unequal. When I visited her school I could see why. I could see where this anger and depression comes from. Her school showed me the discrimination between the Jews and Arabs in Israel. It's like seeing for real one of the reasons all of the events happened."

Yoni added, "I was left with many thoughts about the conditions that they study in. I learned how they live, and it is very different than the way I live. There is no comparison with the school. We hear about it in all the coexistence sessions but it was harder to see it in person."

Being in Arabeh allowed the group to confront something painful and extremely important; the death of Asel Asleh, a Seed of Peace and a native of Arabeh, in the October clashes that took place outside Arabeh. Nardin Asleh, Asel's sister, took the group to the spot where Asel was killed by security forces (see Winter 2000/01 edition).

"Seeing Nardin speak about Asel was one of the most painful and meaningful experiences in my life," Rita said. "I didn't really know Asel, but I understood from his friends, the Tribute book, and now from Nardin how much we lost, how huge and indescribable this loss is. It's not only the family's loss, it's a huge loss to all of us as a society. Asel could have been one of the greatest leaders. Nardin made such a huge impact on me. She is so full of courage and so full of strength. She is an inspiration."

Yoni was also moved: "I think that the family are very brave and courageous people, willing to stay talking and friends with Jews even after what happened. I really respect them."

"It wasn't the first time that I went to Arabeh," said Reem Kaldawy from Haifa, who had been to camp with Asel in 1997. "I went there a week after Asel was killed. The first time was much more emotional. The second time I went to see how others reacted. Both sides got to see how the other reacted. It is not a matter of being a Jew or an Arab, what matters is how the human being feels when tragedy happens. It is how you feel towards the death of someone."

I asked Nidaa what she thought was gained by the group visiting her hometown. She said, "I think that the Jewish-Israelis understood what I was talking about. It is different when I tell them in coexistence. I am glad that we did this."

Seeds of Peace is about dialogue between groups in conflict. This group went a step further, not just hearing, but going to see for themselves. They plan to create further opportunities to host one another and catch a glimpse of each other's realities.

## Widening the Circle of Peace: Bring-A-Friend

by Lana Mansour (Tira)

Having a wide look at this world, I can see few examples of peace. Killings, murders and massacres tend to be absolutely normal things. But Seeds of Peace still do not easily give up on our strong belief. For this reason, our responsibility to make this a better world is becoming greater. And I, as a Seed, was all the time waiting for the chance to do anything for the improvement of humanity.

The sessions with my coexistence group were extraordinary, in the positive meaning, of course. We decide, all together to adopt a project called "Bring a Friend." It consisted of group members bringing one friend each and



Group D hosted by Rinat in Akko.

city, the people and the mood.

Yaara Ashkenazi from Karmiel saw fewer people than before: "You can tell that people are much less open. Before, you would see people walking around and talking and trying to get you to buy things. Now it was empty."

Khaled Zouabi from Tibeh Village was impacted as well. "Some bad things were happening in Acco when we went there," he said. "Before the October events there were a lot of tourists there, but now there is no one. It made me upset. I feel Acco is my village; if the people in Acco are happy than I am happy. If the people of Acco are sad, I am sad. The first



organizing a common meeting, so that they can get to know the other side in a positive way.

Many reasons were behind our decision. We all, for instance, were aspiring to strengthen our connection with that pure dream...peace. It was important for me to bring a friend of mine to one meeting with Seeds of Peace. She was fed up with my praises for it, was really hopeless about Palestinians and Israelis coexistence, and harbored hatred towards Jews. I just needed to simplify things for her, and show her the human side, which is the most important one. I wanted to have the feeling that "Yes, I did something as a Seed of Peace".

Well, I went to Hadil - my chosen friend - and asked her to join me to a very exciting experiment at Seeds of Peace, that may change her ideas about Jews, and may change theirs

## Going All the Way: Coex MARATHON

by Yael Nir (Afula)

The Coexistence Marathon was the conclusion of all our Arab-Jewish meetings. I came to the Marathon filled with fear, expectations, and anxiety. It felt like coming to camp again. The opening session, the coexistence meetings, the fun and nervousness of getting to know new people; even the dining hall was like at camp with songs, table cheers, and Jared Fishman's imitation of camp director Tim Wilson. The only difference was with my coexistence group. Because we had already been working together for several months, we were able to reach even higher levels in our discussions.



Group A, scavenger hunt winners, on the way to victory.

# ...FOR COEXISTENCE



Mayaan and Diana work on the Scavenger Hunt.

about Arabs. I was surprised to see her agreeing quickly and becoming very happy. She was making me crazy during three weeks with her anxiety about the date of the meeting. And then came the days... they were useful meetings, also for me. We discussed so many topics that constituted obstacles between the sides. It was amazing how our friends worked with us, looking interested to know everything. I'm glad to say my friend changed her opinion about Jews. Now she realizes that they have a human side. Here's what she said - word for word: "Thank you, Lana, for giving me the chance to meet such great guys. I'm proud of myself because I showed them a different picture of Arabs, and so they did about themselves. Thanks a lot, and ask the group for one more meeting...Please!" I also hope the coexistence sessions will continue, as they were really important to me. Now, and only now, I feel my creed and my ultimate aim in life, peace, getting closer to my heart.

In the first day, we discussed our perspectives about the future. We had the feeling of really understanding each other and were listening carefully to each other. That night's discussion was hard and serious but positive. In fact, we reached a peak. I felt like all our previous sessions had been preparing us for this meeting. We spoke about all the topics we had previously avoided. Because we had a lot of time, we could really reach the bottom of things. We reached an understanding that was so deep that the group was completely silent for a full minute. That was the most precious moment I have experienced in Seeds of Peace, after Raya read a poem in Hebrew about the Druze. I think that moment will always be treasured in our hearts.

The next morning we had, once again, a coexistence session. We began in "uni-national meetings," Jews together and Arabs together. This allowed us to examine our own side more critically. When the whole group joined back together, we opened some of the issues that were raised. The next hour we talked about difficult things like the Intifada, and our feelings about the Israeli and the Palestinian flags. The meeting was painful and we argued a lot. I felt disappointed, like we took a step backwards. I found myself trying to understand, why am I in Seeds of Peace? What happened since yesterday? The conversation was penetrating, hard.

Now, when I look back, I know that even though it was painful, the conversation was between true friends; people that managed to

have a real and honest discussion instead of trying to "win" the argument. I realized that this meeting was not a step backwards at all. In the Marathon, I got a lot of answers, but the more answers I got, the more questions I took away. One thing I learned is that questions and doubts show knowledge and awareness more than answers. I also understand that we can't reach a compromise if we don't open our wounds, talk about the problems and try to understand.

In the last hour of the Marathon, my group, like every other group, did the Scavenger Hunt. It was competitive and fun and we really worked together as a team. It reminded us again how much we love each other. For me, personally, I struggled to make it through the push-ups and you should have seen each member of our group try to eat an entire matzah!

The Marathon was an amazing and wonderful conclusion of an important process. It brought back hope to me. I hope that someday we can have another Marathon just for fun, together with the Palestinian Seeds.

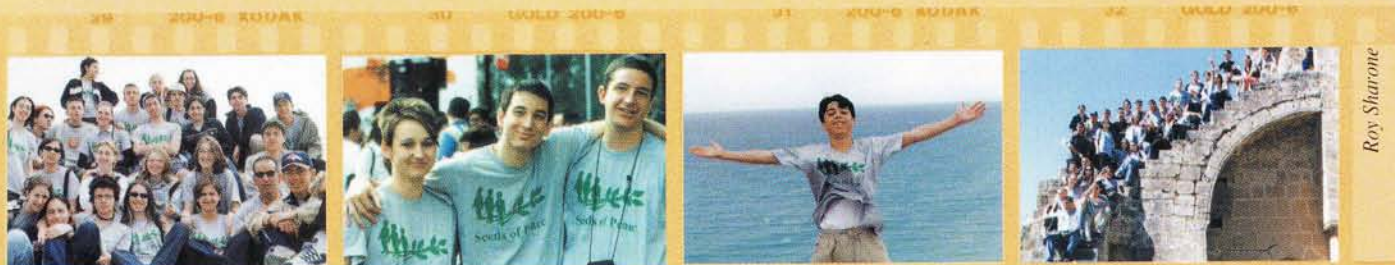
Gili and Adar help each other get the Matza down fast





# BALKAN SEEDS REUNION STYLE

Sixty Seeds of Peace from nine Balkan delegations came together for a week-long workshop in Larnaca, Cyprus, to rekindle friendships and to develop the dialogue they began at last summer's Youth Peace Initiative in Greece.



Roy Shiarone

## Coexistence Program

The coexistence program included two hours each day of facilitated dialogue, and two hours for working on the mosaic project. The youth were divided into four groups — two groups focusing on the Bosnian-Croat-Serb conflicts, and two groups focusing on Slav-Albanian conflicts in Kosovo and Macedonia. To learn more about the complex situations in different parts of the Balkans, see the stories that Balkan Seeds contributed to THE OLIVE BRANCH on pp. 11-13.



Larry Malm

Above: Group shot at the amphitheatre. Nikolina, Uki and Marko share a smile, Orce thinks about joining Aphrodite, the monestary above Kyrenia. Left, from left: Cutting the stones, applying the glue, putting the stones in place. Below left: Balkan Seeds presenting their completed mosaics.



Jared Fishman

## Mosaic Project

The mosaic project challenged the youth to work together to deal with the issues in a more creative fashion. The first step of the project was for each participant to make a list of words side by side that indicated fear and non-fear. At that point, the group engaged in different exercises involving their words. Then, on an individual basis, each participant would draw an image of one or more of their non-fear words. Once completed, each member of the group would share his/her image and explain the meaning. The group then came together to create a "Collective Image of Non-Fear" incorporating all of the individual images — a process that required major negotiation. (For example, for

one person the image of a soldier can signify safety and non-fear, while for another person in that group, the soldier can represent the opposite.) Once completed, the group image is transposed onto a 1-meter square tile of plywood. Colors were assigned to different parts of the image, and then the process of laying of individual stones to create the larger image began. While some members of the group were involved in this manual creation, others worked on creating a text to describe the meaning of the group image. These mosaics have been shipped back to Jerusalem and will be displayed (along with those finished by Arab and Israeli youth) at the Center.



# GROWING UP IN KOSOVO

## Memories of Normal Life

by Jelena Trajkovic (Kosovo Polje)

I have memories of, before the war, when I had an almost normal life. I could go to clubs and cafes with my friends. However, things were not "normal" like all over the world. Before "real war" in 1999, there were problems, like the Albanian's protests, which happened every few months. Sometimes protesters broke shop windows in front of my building. I never knew the reason why, but I was scared.. I was just a small child with big fears.

In 1999, when the bombing started I did not know that was the beginning of the nightmare, which has continued until now. In the first days I watched as TV news showed the bombing. I didn't really understand what was happening. One night, while I was asleep in bed, a bomb fell 200 meters from my house. First I asked myself: "Am I alive or not?" I looked around to see if my family had survived. Everything was broken: windows, doors and all around were pieces of the bomb. I heard my mother crying. Luckily, all members of my family were O.K.

Every day after that, we heard sounds of bombardment, and we heard about innocent people who died. I asked myself, "What did we do to deserve this?"

When the bombing stopped, we hoped for a better life; we were disappointed. In one day, half the Serbian population of my town left their houses for Serbia, including most of my friends. That was the worst time; I lived with no hope; I didn't believe in anything. I had nightmares, and woke with tears in my eyes.

When school started, it was really hard. We didn't have enough books, notebooks, a school building or many other necessities..

The situation calmed down, but it is still far from "normal." Almost every month somebody is killed, or somebody's house is burnt. Since March 2001, when eight people died in a bus explosion, we can only leave Kosovo with UN protection. Sometimes it seems to me that my life is a life as a prisoner. I can't go where I want. I can't visit my friends. I have no after school activities. I cannot leave my house to go to discos or cafes. In order to get to school, I need to leave early and walk long distances to avoid Albanian towns.

Sometimes, I lose hope for a better future here, in Kosovo. Seeds of Peace, and my friends all over the Balkans and all over the world, taught me that everybody is important in peacemaking, no matter how old that person is. I learned how to respect people from other sides of the conflict. I became friends with many of them and that really means a lot to me. Now I know that together we can make our future safer.

## Memories of Milosevic

by Nita Himaduna (Prishtina)

The open violence in Kosovo began after the government of Slobodan Milosevic revoked the Constitution in 1989. Albanians were forbidden from getting educated in their native language. This meant that the University and all the schools belonged only to the Serbs.

The autumn of 1990 was full of events. It was the start of the war for me. On one side there was a heavily armed military force and on the other side an empty-handed population, condemned for their thoughts, conversations and statements. That year I began school in my teacher's house, with no desks or chairs. My parents had to do work outside of their profession in order to survive, because they were Albanians.

There were police raids in schools and teachers were arrested. In the institutions, it was illegal to speak Albanian. Albanians held elections in houses, which often led to arrests. Even today, there is no information concerning some who disappeared.

I finished my first year of high school still studying in a house, never feeling safe, my mother worried if I would come home at all. While we waited for freedom, world leaders met at the Rambulliet Conference to negotiate our situation. Milosevic refused to agree. No solution. 'What will happen to us?'

March 24th, 1999, NATO bombing begins and Serb army attacks increase. Anxiety, nightmares, reports of killings, raping, looting. It's impossible to stay, the army can be here any moment. What will happen with us? March 26th, at night. All of a sudden, the sound of a car at our door. It stops. The Policeman throws a bomb. Fortunately, we were in the basement. Nobody was hurt. We are waiting. They will get inside and massacre us. Horror... Terror...

It seems that they have left. They thought they reached their goal and left. It seemed it would take years until the dawn.

No food left. A lot of missing and massacred people. Home raids separate the men from their families. Crowds head in unknown directions.

Terrors beyond human imagination. Traces of blood in the streets, blood everywhere. I can not find more words to describe it. We did not fear death anymore, but we feared the kind of death awaiting us. I recalled movies about Jewish people during the Second World War.

This is over now. The day arrived when NATO troops entered Kosovo, and Serb troops left. It seemed that I have survived. Freedom? Is it possible? Is it real? Can I express myself freely? Now it is. Now, we hope to build an independent future. It's worth living. It's worth contributing for the future, for peace.



Larry Malm



Above, from left: Jelena, Zana, Miranda.

Below: The table is set for lunch.

*Seeds cross the checkpoints separating the Serbian and Albanian communities in Kosovo. This April, with the assistance of the UNMIK police, Jelena, a Serb Seed, hosted Albanian Seeds Zana and Miranda and their friends Tina and Majlinda for lunch and an afternoon of laughs and these photographs.*