

Sadaka-Reut's

Newsletter

March 2006

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Building a Community at Sadaka Reut's Youth Seminar

Anna Cohen-Yanay, member of the Tel-Aviv Jaffa youth group
On Sadaka Reut's youth seminar, February 16-17, 2006, northern Israel

I have participated in many of Sadaka Reut's youth seminars before, but never have I felt such a familiarity among the participants and the staff as I did at the most recent event. As opposed to previous seminars, which revolved around a specific theme or main discussion topic (such as media or historical narrative, this seminar focused on personal and collective acquaintance. This focus, together with the fact that most of us knew each other in some way or another from previous events, created a very friendly and cooperative environment which contributed positively to the seminar.

The seminar was organized in a way that combined group discussions and activities with free time. During the many of the activities, we were divided into three sections and I must say that the group I was in had a very special dynamic. There was an overall feeling of unity and agreement, even though there were some pretty major

conflicts which were brought up during discussions. In other words, there was this feeling, naïve as it may be, that friendship and goodwill can overcome all disagreements, and if not overcome them, at least make it possible to get along in spite of them.

The subjects discussed in the different groups varied in this specific seminar because no discussion topic was imposed on us. In my group, the dialogue mostly centered on the tensions between weak versus strong groups in society, in relation to different parts of our identity – whether national, sexual or ethnic.

All in all, the seminar ended with participants demonstrating strong motivation for action to bring back to our respective communities the ideas and attitudes that we had developed, or at least were in the process of developing inside our group.



The Commune: Six Months Later

By Zohar Elmakias

Recently, the members of the Sadaka Reut commune were required to deal with a new type of work; the organization of a youth seminar. The organizational work of a seminar differs greatly from the other kinds of work we do, such as facilitating workshops or volunteering in the local community of Jaffa. As a group, we had to arrange every aspect of the seminar: dealing with the many logistical issues and going through the thought process of structuring and writing workshops and activities for the young men and women participating in the seminar. Some of the commune members also facilitated these workshops during the seminar, which gave them the opportunity to see their theoretical work come to life and take form, influencing and challenging the young minds in front of them.

However, this is just one example of the challenges we, as volunteers and commune members, have to deal with. Many other challenges had already been presented to us throughout the course of the year: leaving home, moving into a shared apartment with other young people, learning to initiate projects and deciding how much we want to be involved in and how devoted to our work we will be. I see these everyday challenges as part of the larger process that we are going through. I am certain that this year of volunteering, for me and my fellow commune members, is a year of both learning and practicing social activism. While acquiring new skills in the fields of facilitation, spokespersonship and the building

of an educational process, I also deal with both practical and theoretical levels of issues such as religion, gender, nationality, ideology, belonging and simultaneously criticizing, on a daily basis.

The importance of doing both – belonging and criticizing – is crucial for me. My relationships with my flat-mates, as well as our group dynamics as a whole, are all being tested, not only with the eye of emotions and friendships, but also with a critical eye; one that reflects a discourse of concepts such as oppression, empowerment, community building, conflict and social awareness.

These relationships and this discourse lie at the basis of the project, 'One Year of Life for Coexistence.' The different levels on which our lives take place – the levels of activism and thinking processes, social and educational work, small talks and profound discussions, internships and everyday life – are all the ingredients of what is to become the whole experience of this year and what is bound to continue and accompany us in whatever we do next.



'Toward a Common Future' in Two High Schools

Orthodox School, Ramle

Hassan Towafra, TCF facilitator and current commune member

Continuing our work from last year, this year we implemented workshops on tolerance education through our 'Toward a Common Future' program in high school classes at the Orthodox School in Ramle. The Orthodox School is a Christian high school, which includes both Muslim and Christian students who live in and around the cities of Ramle and Lod. The school is considered to be high quality both in terms of the level of academics and the overall school environment.

The 'Toward a Common Future' program brings us, the facilitators, to the school to give students a forum in which to discuss the issue of identity; to discover what their individual identities are, how they relate to their identities and how their identities play a role in their lives.

We ran two series of workshops in the school, one with the 9th grade and the second with the 10th grade students. For each class of twenty students, two facilitators came and conducted 5-7 meetings. Each meeting was built around a specific topic and together, all of the workshops were built around a common thread which connected the meetings to each other. Workshops focused on topics such as different types of identity, opinions, racism, group belonging, isolationism, issues of equality/inequality in society and more. The meetings were built largely using discussions, but also employed games and alternative workshop methods.

As my first time as a group facilitators, I have to say that this was an incredibly positive experience. It was thrilling to watch the process that the group went through; to see the passions that came out of the students from the meetings, the topics that students brought up, the open discussions and the ideas that the students presented reached a level that showed initiative to change opinions and attitudes.



This group was very special due to the tensions that exist in the school and the surrounding environment. These tensions include those between Christians and Muslims in the school, the national tensions that exist within the state and the tensions between separate groups within Arab society. Such tensions are what often turn youth into pessimists or racists, yet through these workshops, these youth showed that they possessed the aptitude and desire to choose optimism and ambition that will make them future leaders who will succeed in solving these conflicts and tensions.

From their comments and impressions throughout the workshops, we saw that because students openly presented their honest opinions and feelings, relations between the classmates were strengthened. Above all, what I found most gratifying and rewarding from these workshops were the strong relationships which we saw established between the students in the classes.

Berl Katsenelson High School, Kfar Saba
Tsion Hazan, TCF facilitator and former commune member



Although I finished high-school two years ago, I still feel as though there is something I missed out on from those years of schooling. I now see clearly how my peers and I were under tremendous pressures from the formal school system to conform to socio-political norms, and I see now how we, as pupils in this system, felt we needed to surrender to, or at least avoid confronting, such pressures. Today, it is clear to me that there were ways, even back then, by

which we could have maintained our beliefs, stood our ground and openly debated the issues which we felt had been forced upon us. We could have voiced our thoughts, from a point of complete respect and acceptance for the people that administrate the school, to say that we, as full members of this system, would like to see and experience something different! But still, it is always easier to look back and feel that you should have done things in a smarter way. The better question to ask oneself is, "how can I do things smarter and better now?"

In the framework of the TCF project, I was given the opportunity to meet youth who are in the same place where I was not so long ago. These meetings took place in the educational system, but there were times in which I felt as though the class in which we sat had turned into a parallel, protected space. The discussions in the workshops were held in a circle in which each participant was given the right to speak out and be heard, while learning from each other. In the small instances we spent together, the tiring school atmosphere of compulsory learning, exams and grade stress turned into something that we could talk about. From that point on we

were also able to discuss different social and political subjects and to look at them from a critical standpoint. One of the most noteworthy events during these workshops for me was when the group got around to discussing the significance of political and social awareness as a force that permits one to make good decisions.

As for the decisions these youth will make in the future, I will probably not be witness, but thanks to the few true moments I had the chance to share with these youth, I am sure we will all be able to be a little smarter in the future.

Spring in the Boulevard, Tel Aviv-Jaffa youth group

Adi Maoz, Educational Director

I have been closely observing this inspiring group of Arab and Jewish youth from Jaffa and Tel Aviv for the past year and a half. They have come a long way since they first met, all shy and nervous about this new and exciting encounter with the other side, not really sure what they could say or what was appropriate. Today when I look at them, I see youth that have made a clear choice to take their personal experiences and growth from their group and bring it to their local communities to try and make a change; to express an alternative to what most people know of Arab-Jewish relations.

For the past couple months they have been working to put on a block party in Jaffa. These youth are responsible for all the details of this event, from advertising to organizational elements, as well as recruiting bands (of Jewish and Arab youth) that will play music at the block party. They have decided to call this event "Spring in the Boulevard" because it will take place in the main boulevard in Jaffa. The event is designed to bring together people from Jaffa's diverse communities to enjoy food, music and dance while being part of a larger political message of Arab-Jewish cooperation. Additionally, there are several group members who are organizing a street theater performance, which will be presented at the party. They have been rehearsing intensively with one of Sadaka-Reut's

facilitators who is also trained in theater. The unique nature of their work is rooted in the methods of theater they are using, which deal with the oppression that they experience as youth

living in Jaffa. They plan to perform rehearsed scenes as well as work to create a dialogue with the audience, asking them to take an active role in changing attitudes and breaking down barriers of oppression.

This group of youth made an impressive decision to take the tools and methods of dialogue,

which they acquired in their group and use them to create a larger discourse with the people in their community who are not accustomed to the idea of Arab-Jewish partnership.



Police-Community Relations in Jaffa

Raz Weiner, Markaz founder and former commune member

“Violence in Jaffa has become routine. Drug dealing, robberies, break-ins, and retaliatory killings of feuding gangs occur in the street in the middle of the day. Innocent people are killed or wounded only because they had the bad luck to run into a gang battle. Everyone knows this, but they are afraid to speak up, carefully watching their words, particularly with reporters. The feeling of distrust in the police is pervasive. The education and welfare systems have withered and failed over the years. But lately even veteran residents feel they cannot keep silent anymore.”

(Source: MAHSOM, by Salo Alinat .23.01.2006 <http://212.179.113.235/mahsom/index.php>)

Due to these sentiments and observations on the effect that violence and crime has had on the Jaffa community, we at the Markaz decided to hold a community gathering dedicated to the issue of “Law and Order in Jaffa.” Guest speakers for the event included two active representatives of the community who were born and



raised in Jaffa. We contacted the police and asked them to send a representative, but because of logistical difficulties they did not. The gathering included approximately thirty people representing youth workers, Jewish and Arab residents and social activists who came together and actively discussed the issues of police and community. The discussion gave birth to two ideas for practical changes:

One conclusion was that many people are simply not aware of what the police are allowed to do under the law. Hence a short leaflet is being composed in Arabic, Hebrew and Russian, detailing the rights of citizens, both minors and adults, when faced by a police official. This leaflet is intended to empower citizens and undo their feelings of defenselessness.

The second idea regarded reporting incidents of police assault. Audience members suggested the establishment of a hot-line that will operate 24-7 allowing youth who have been assaulted by the police to report what happened. Although this idea seems both effective and feasible, we do not have the resources to sustain it. Despite that, we plan to start keeping record of cases and personal stories and try to draw the attention of journalists and reporters to this situation.

About a week later, a community police officer came to meet with us. The policeman claimed that the job of the police in Jaffa is incredibly challenging. He mentioned that a large group of residents are actually content with the police work in Jaffa. We invited him to

speak at a future gathering and he agreed to aid us in compiling the citizen's rights leaflet.

Following these events, Osnat and Lisa, ‘Markaz’ members who are now establishing a local youth magazine for Jaffa, decided to dedicate the first issue of the magazine to the subject of police and violence in the city, including personal stories and the point of view of the police, as well as poems, short stories and other creative pieces of teenagers expressing their views and experiences. This issue is obviously charged and complicated. As a group that focuses on informal youth work and the promotion of alternative social and political dynamics, there is only so much within our power to do and clearly, our first priority is the safety of teenagers in Jaffa. The more frameworks for youth care and activities that exist in Jaffa, the less chance each teenager will have to turn to crime. We deem the lack of communication between the police and the community in Jaffa as a major source of hostility and violence. Through our work we hope to expand the scope for such dialogue and create an opportunity for all parties involved to see the other's perspective, and perhaps alter this grave reality – together.

Cracked Asphalt Lips Whisper

“I’ll aim my pain / between your eyes like a bullet / so no ambulance can recover / what I have forgotten”

Sead (17), Jaffa delinquent youth facility

“In the place where dynamite / sprouts in the soil / this pen writes / the ink flows“

Nadeem (17), Jaffa delinquent youth facility



There are many ways to find oneself integrated into a city. Every city has the ability to pass on to those existing within it anything from the subtlety of its textures and rhythms to the adopting of language or historical narrative. In regards to urban social activism, organizations often overlook the subtleties of individual urban identities for the wider scope of encouragement and endorsement of broad social or political change. The simultaneous desire to learn a reality and to change it is often paralyzing.

Working with Jaffa youth over the past two years, I have met a wide range of the city’s young people – all under the adhesive “drop-out”, “street” or “delinquent youth” titles. I work through study centers for youth at risk, evening centers for street youth and an incarceration facility for delinquent youth. At these “rough edges” of the city, I have found my role as an intermediary for change most compatible – as I have encountered youth with intense motivation to rehabilitate their own lives, as well as strong desires to see and create change in the dim reality, which this city holds in store for its young residents.

The basis of my work with these youths is creating supportive and committed environments, through maintaining a street-level presence and approaching individual “at-risk” youths in order to integrate them into personal mentoring programs. In the framework of such programs, the focus is on studies or pursuit and development of talents (writing, music, theatre, photography).

This intensive personal work with over a dozen teenagers has sprouted several projects initiated with and by these youths for the purpose of taking their actions and abilities to a broader level of social awareness and change. “Ablaze:” a series of public art events showcasing Jaffa youth active in various fields of art, is one such project. Since January we have held three events, which presented work of young Jaffa artists in poetry, music, photography and film. The events were not only designed to expose the youth as creators and performers, but also to integrate them as curators and organizers. They were successful in drawing large crowds and media attention and establishing an important platform for these crucial voices.

Additionally, three youth groups, which bring together these youths with other members of Sadaka Reut’s Arab-Jewish activities, have been established to work on projects using photography, writing and theatre. Many are taking part in various Sadaka Reut projects, such as the Jaffa youth newspaper and the “Spring in the Boulevard” block party.

The nature of this work has not only challenged the theoretical perspectives held by myself and those around me regarding the critical issues of our work and goals in Jaffa, but also has led me into an entanglement of personal struggles where the delicate lines and borders crumble between my role as mentor and friend, teacher and ally, facilitator and household member. In the “rough edges” of this city I have found a place open to my approach as an “outsider,” crucial for one wishing to understand the undercurrents and forces breathing under the city’s skin.

Between the layers of crumbs and dust of lingual, national and cultural cornerstones crumbling in clashes, looking closely through the sidewalk cracks, this city offers a spark, a glimpse of young lives laying bricks for a solid foundation of change, just under our soles.



Yonatan Kunda, former commune member