

# art be upon us . . . and upon us peace

creating a peaceable kingdom with Creativity for Peace

by Devon Jackson

IT'S CALLED CREATIVITY FOR PEACE, and it's a camp that's all about creating female leaders and empowering them in ways that—*inshallah*, God willing—will one day allow Jews and Muslims, Israelis and Palestinians to peacefully coexist. At times, though, it seems as if even the campers and the organizers of this unique and uniquely inspiring enterprise forget that it's the facilitative and transformative power of art as much as anything else that gives it such force. Meaning: it's Creativity for Peace. Not Business Solutions for Peace. Not Leaders for Peace. Not even Peaceniks for Peace. It is through art and creativity—creating ways of communicating with and listening to one another, creatively thinking outside the box—that these young women grow and change and touch and inspire the adults around them as much as they touch and inspire each other.



2010 Campers Noam Ganelevin (Jewish Israeli) and Aseel Adel Alan (Palestinian)

Cofounded in 2003 by psychotherapist and peace activist Rachel Kaufman and artist Debra Sugerman, C4P brings 30 to 40 young women each summer to Kaufman's 40 acres of paradise in Glorieta. Half of the girls, who range from 14 to 22 years old, are Jewish, half Arab. They all travel the 7,000 miles from Israel, the West Bank, Gaza; they all must speak English; and they've all applied to get into the three-week camp, which starts in late July. In the eight years since it began, C4P has brought in 162 girls (the cost of each attendee being about \$5,500; C4P has an annual budget of approximately \$550,000 and is entirely funded by private foundations and individuals). Of those, at least a fifth return to the camp as young leaders; like college-dorm RAs, these experienced young women help campers negotiate what is often their first extended, intimate encounter with someone they've long regarded—or been taught to regard—as their enemy.

Over the 21 days the girls spend at Kaufman's retreat, they engage in dialogues, participate in art-therapy projects and team-building activities, go to the mall, hang out, cry it out, hug it out, and generally try to enjoy their time away from a home life that's in a constant state of tension if not outright military conflict. "Every one of these girls knows someone who's been killed," says Dottie Indyke, the nonprofit's energetic executive director who took over in 2007 after Kaufman suffered a brain hemorrhage. "They're traumatized from the violence. It's hard. But a lot of bonding happens in nonstructured time. When they realize they have more in common than not, that's the beginning of our work."

"Before coming to Creativity for Peace, I'd created this wall around me, but after many dialogs I was able to open up and bring out the pain inside me," emails Nahida Tannous, 18, a camper in 2008 and a young leader last summer who's now studying media and communication. She is Muslim and lives in Ramallah. "I learned to listen more to all points of view and to search for what unites us, not for what separates us."

Maya Hochstadter, 20, lives in Hila in northern Israel and just finished her mandatory army service. Hoping to get into design school in Tel Aviv, she was a camper in 2006 and 2008, then served as a young leader in 2010. That first time, she had no idea what she'd gotten into. "A girl I was a little scared of, and whom I'd hated for things she'd said in the dialogue room, she cried for me when I told my story," says Hochstadter through email. "We became good friends and went shopping at Ross."

Most of the young women have similar experiences. However, none of what they go through is easy, which is perhaps why

it's so rewarding. "Peace work needs lots of courage, faith, love, and compassion," emails Silvia Margia, 40, the group's Palestinian, Nazareth-based Young Leaders coordinator. "It's ongoing, internal work." Indeed, as Indyke points out, many of the young women have a delayed reaction to what they've been through. "The change in three weeks isn't always so immediately obvious," she says. "Besides, we're not just a camp. We're a year-round program. This is just the beginning of a continuum that can go on for years."

As trying as C4P can be, though, it's a respite, a semblance of normal. "For once I could act as a normal teenage girl who wants to live normally, and just have a break from this heavy duty (the situation back home) that I have been holding on to all my life," says Tannous. "We're not only living the change we wish to see," says Margia. "We're also creating a common history, after living a whole life of separation and boundaries."

"Being in New Mexico made the experience a lot more effective because we were in a new place, far from home and far from all our problems, news, and other friends," says Mai Shbeta, 20, who lives in Wahat al-Salâm ("the oasis of peace") in Israel, a small village where Jews and Arabs choose to live together. Shbeta first attended C4P in 2007 as a camper, then returned in 2010 as a young leader; she also participated at last year's Davos Forum and plans to work for human rights and peace. "We had time and a place to concentrate on the process, and we had to help each other because we couldn't call home."

But as important as it is to dialogue with each other, expressing themselves in other ways, particularly visually, through art, is just as crucial. The art-therapy sessions—where the young women make masks together, construct body outlines of one another, and develop a multimedia truth mandala dealing with anger, grief, fear, and hope, among other activities—challenge them to continue their process in a nonverbal way and offers them a



2010 Young Leader Mai Shbeta (Palestinian Jewish Israeli) and Camper Daniel Tiano (Jewish Israeli)

breather from the often-intense group dialogue sessions. It can also just be a way to have uninhibited fun. "When we're trying to understand deep and complex parts of ourselves, it can be easier to access those parts through a less-structured form of perception and expression than words," explains Jesse Cross, 33, who's been the group's art therapist for the past three years. "Art and other imaginative processes offer other routes into and out of the vast inner worlds of the human."

Cross, who specializes in treating war trauma, points out that C4P is different from every other organization of its kind in that it is almost 100 percent group work and that "any trauma resolution happens within the group context and not

individually—so it feels more proactive. It's also the only peace camp of its kind in the U.S. that utilizes the arts in the peace building and conflict-resolution process.

An important aspect of the work C4P does is that it's preventative as well as healing. "Even if there's peace tomorrow," says Indyke, "it doesn't change the work we're doing." Cross agrees, predicting, "The work they do here may very well prevent future devastation."

This is an idea echoed by almost every young woman who's been through the program. "I hope one day I'll be able to spread the message of C4P and its work all over the world," says Tannous. "I'm glad that I changed in such a good way for such a great reason—peace." ■