



# Living in the Holy Land: Respecting Differences - Exposing Palestinian and Israeli Students to Each Other's Religions

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## Living in the Holy Land:

Respecting Differences

### EXPOSING PALESTINIAN AND ISRAELI STUDENTS TO EACH OTHER'S RELIGIONS

Under the title: LIVING IN THE HOLY LAND: RESPECTING DIFFERENCES an Israeli and a Palestinian educational agency – the Israeli "Center for Educational Technology" in Tel Aviv and the Palestinian "NOOR Information and Research Center" in Ramallah — have launched a joint innovative educational program designed to promote understanding between Israelis and Palestinians by making high school students acquainted with each other's religions .

The goal is to foster respectful and accepting attitudes among each group toward the members of various religious streams: Christianity, Islam and Judaism and to raise awareness and appreciation about the religion of the other and to help young people move toward these goals.

Though religion may not be the express cause of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, religious differences are at least partly at its root. Even for those who define themselves as "secular", religion is often a key factor in defining their individual identity. Despite the central role of religion in determining national and cultural identity for both Palestinian and Israelis, each side has a remarkably low level of understanding and appreciation for the other's religion.

People on both sides of the conflict manipulate tenets of their faith to reinforce political positions and "claims" on territory and resources, while moderates striving for peace often turn away from religion - viewing it as partially to blame for the ongoing conflict. By doing so, the moderates have left religion in the hands of extremists and fanatics, forfeiting the chance to draw from the multitude of rich sources within Christianity, Islam and Judaism which provide valuable support for reconciliation, understanding and peace.

A team of Palestinian and Israeli educational experts are developing curricula to:

0. teach teachers and students basic facts about Christianity, Islam and Judaism, while at the same time encouraging their discerning skills regarding religious faith in general;
0. help students overcome stereotypes and fear of each other premised on religious misconceptions;
0. foster respect for religion and all religious choices, including non-observance;
0. providing opportunities for students, teachers and parents of participating students to engage in dialogue and joint activities for the sake of justice, reconciliation and peace, with the hope that these contacts will foster on-going friendships between members of the different groups.

The program is funded by a grant from the Yad Hanadiv Foundation in Jerusalem. In consultation with a team of Palestinian and Israeli educational experts, it is being developed by Dr. J. Schoneveld, a Christian theologian from the Netherlands, who was formerly General Secretary of the International Council of Christians and Jews (with its section "Abrahamic Forum" for Muslim-Jewish-Christian dialogue) at the Martin Buber House in Heppenheim, Germany. He is presently fellow at the Harry S. Truman Research Institute for the Advancement of Peace of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, and a scholar-in-residence at the Tantur Ecumenical Institute for Theological Studies in Jerusalem.

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