

"Always at your command"
The fight for the independence of Israel
Interview with Yehuda Ziv, a "Palmach Warrior"

Tuesday Oct. 2

Israelis/Germans doing interviews in Jerusalem

18:00 Dinner

Working in groups on the topics

Wednesday Oct. 3

Visiting the Schechter Institute for Conservative Judaism

Israelis/Germans doing interviews in Jerusalem

18:00 Dinner

Thursday Oct. 4

Interviewing each other: Roles of women and men, future

16:30 Interview with Yoel Freudenberg (84)

20:00 Farewell Party in Talitha Kumi

Palmach

The Palmach ("strike force") was the elite fighting force of the Haganah, one of the underground armies of the Jewish community during the British mandate time for Palestine (1920 to 1948). It was established in 1941 and had about 2.000 male and female members when the war broke out on May 14, 1948. After the war the Palmach was dissolved and integrated into the Israeli Army, the IDF (Israeli Defence Forces). The Palmach is part of many myths which came into existence during the foundation of the state of Israel. Famous commanders were Yitzak Rabin or Moshe Dayan.

Yehudah's family came from Russia, was deported to Siberia before they could escape to Palestine. The former teacher is now 87 years old, was drafted into the army in 1943 when he was just 17. Under the impression of German fighting in North Africa and the Jewish struggle for survival in Europe, his aim was to defend the Jews living in Palestine at that time.



We are sitting in a wonderful garden in Jerusalem and listening to the story of Yehuda Ziv. He speaks in a clear voice about the time, when Jews were struggling for their independence. Yehudah started a teacher's career in 1945, but was re-drafted when the war began.

At first the Palmach was even sponsored by the British, as they had to assist the British army against the Germans in North Africa, as many feared the Germans could invade Palestine from Egypt. For the German project members it is hard to believe that at the end of the British Mandate Jews, Beduins, Druze and Arabs were fighting

together against British rule. Young girls and women were fighting as well, hiding guns under their dresses,

committing sabotage and guerilla attacks on the British army. Yehudah guesses that about 1/3 of the Palmach were female fighters. He describes the female soldiers as extremely brave, today units of the IDF are called after female heroes of that time.

Men and women were totally equal in the combat units. He recalls the well-known Palmach song, which - to our surprise - Yam sang along with him.

Until today there are meetings and ceremonies of veterans of the Palmach, remembering their struggle more than 60 years ago. Yehudah feels proud of his actions, although he doesn't feel "like a man of war". He says, he was driven into fighting, into defending the Jews living in Palestine. He regrets that there hasn't been peace until now and that many politicians start their own history in 1967, when Israel occupied much Arab land and thought they could occupy and rule other people. His dream of a Jewish state has come true, nevertheless he feels uncomfortable about the present situation, when many Palestinian suicide bombers are regarded as martyrs.



**"In the Palmach
men and women
were equal"**



"The Palmach spirit is still alive"



Palmach - Men and women into war



The seven "Azalzalot" (in Arabic it means "female deer, beauty ibex") of the second company (military unit), which was the first group of girls who served in the Palmach (Israeli Guerilla), in the big journey (10 days) to the Judean Desert.

Pictures and grey texts designed by Tamar Novoplansky



Hadasa Avidgor - from the "Phormans" girls (The convoy's escorts). She is the narrator of the book "Bderech Shalachno", meaning "The way we went". In the picture you can see her practising in retrieving a "Stan" submachine gun from the silk dress.

One aim of the project was to listen to other perspectives and narratives and to think about the own attitude. That's the first step for a mutual understanding. The foundation of the state of Israel is the best example for that.

Left: Yehudah Ziv doing a "show off" by cleaning his teeth with a commando knife. He was only 22 years old at that time - but already an "old timer", who was released from the Palmach, but called back to fight in the "War of Independence".
Right: Shosh Malmud (16) from the "Phormans" girls. On the side there's a convoy of Sandwich-armed automobiles. In the picture she is ready to go to the place the convoy is going to be prepared at.



"Nakba"

Jewish Israelis call the fight for their own state "War of Independence", Palestinians and other Arabs call this war and its results "Nakba", the catastrophe. Arabs remember this event on May 15, a day after Jewish Israelis celebrate the declaration of the state of Israel on May 14, 1948. As a consequence of the war about 700.000 Palestinians fled or were driven away from their homeland and tried to find a new home in the surrounding countries. Until now the cause for the refugee problem is very much disputed, also if Arab Israelis should commemorate the "Nakba". Until now the refugee problem has been one of the main obstacles for a permanent peace.

"I never stop learning" Interview with Sarah Novoplansky (85)



Sarah's family lived in Russia. After the Communist Revolution in 1917 they fled away from the pogroms to Palestine. As they had lived in Odessa on the Black Sea beaches, the new home had to be near a beach too. So they ended up in Karmiel. The parents were very much aware of equality, they were "very socialist and very Zionist". Sarah was born in 1927 in Haifa and joined a Haganah movement group already with 14 and stayed there for six years. Later she became a teacher at Junior High Schools. Her husband escaped from Eastern Europe, he is 89 now. The couple is an example of the tragic history of Jews from East Europe under Communist and later German rule.



We are sitting in a "museum", full of objects - all having personal historical meanings. Sarah is like an open history book, yet much more interesting and vivid. The most striking is her open-mindedness and her mental fitness. She is an example for many immigrants in Israel - representing individual fates and hopes at the same time.

Her parents' education showed her the way to equality. Her father did the washing, cooking and cleaning as well as his wife. So Sarah had a perfect example and therefore always kept on fighting for equal rights. Her mother influenced her most, she felt being "only" a housewife would be like slavery. Although her parents were convinced socialists, they didn't agree with what was going on in Russia after 1917. Her mother worked, reached academic education and taught her daughter: "Studying is a holy thing". So she became addicted to music. Her family couldn't afford a piano, so she had to practise in a neighbour's home. But some day her mother surprised her with a new piano, she had saved money to buy it and to give her daughter the opportunity to study music - her dream had come true.

"Studying is a holy thing"



Besides she had many interests: education, languages (Jiddish), arts, history, archaeology, literature.

"I was educated to be equal - at home and in the Haganah"



In the Haganah they trained together, practised shooting together, fought together for their common aim. She learned the Morse Code and "swore to do everything for her country". Although she had to defend the Jewish settlements, she was never educated to hate Arabs. When in 1941 Palestine was in danger to be occupied by the Nazis, her father hid a revolver to kill his family in case of a German invasion. She met her later husband in 1949 at a birthday party and fell in love at first sight. His history is another example of the "melting pot" Israel: He was

raised in a "stetl" in the Polish-Lithuanian-White Russian corner and spoke Jiddish. Only he and his older sister could escape by joining a partisan group in the forests, the rest of his family perished in the Shoah. Until 1944 he lived undercover, was recruited for the Haganah and escaped illegally by ship to Palestine. He was caught near Beirut and imprisoned in the detainee camp of Atlit near Haifa. This camp was used by the British authorities to detain Jewish immigrants to Palestine.

One Religion - different views on the equality of men and women
Lecture and discussion with Prof. David Golinkin
Schechter Institute, Jerusalem



Rabbi David Golinkin welcomed us at the Schechter Institute. He explained nine different approaches to the status of women in Jewish law. It was a highly academic lecture, but it could open the eyes of the Jewish and Christian project members how Jewish theology argues and how different interpretations of holy writings have developed. He illustrated his topic with various texts reaching from typical haredim or ultra-orthodox authors unto the feminist approach. The topics in question are if women are allowed to recite the Tora or prayers, to witness in front of a Jewish court, to be obliged to use a Mikwe, to get married, to have different roles in family life, to have the Bar or Bat Mitzwa for boys or/and girls, to go the synagogue and where to sit there, to be ordained as a rabbi etc.



The Schechter Institute, Jerusalem

The Institute was founded in 1984 and is affiliated with Conservative Judaism. It is dedicated to the advancement of pluralistic Jewish education in Israel and Europe, it is a non-profit organization and supports four educational institutions for Jewish Studies, especially a school for Israeli educators (636 students), a Rabbinical Seminar (44 students), The TAL Education Fund (40.000 students) and the Midreshet Yerushalayim (2.500 students), which supports in particular immigrants from the former Soviet Union.



After a hard time thinking about religion: relaxing in the sun.

Ultra-orthodox - orthodox - conservative - liberal - reform - progressive - egalitarian - feminism.

All words describing different attitudes within Judaism.

Examples of different Jewish approaches:

Source: D. Golinkin, nine different approaches to the status of women in Jewish law.

Men and women have to be separated in a synagogue.

Men and women should do different things in life. Nature has changed, so men and women have to change too.

Women may not serve as witnesses in Jewish law. The position of men and women can change, if there is no talmudic proof against it.

It is un-ethical if you push women out of society. Men and women are equal, so it's allowed to ordain female rabbis

Men and women should read the Tora.

Boys and girls should do the Bar Mitzwa/Bat Mitzwa.

Each law is human, so it can be changed.

The Tora is not holy

"I have no problem living with Arabs" Interview with Yoel Freudentberg (84)



Yoel Freudentberg, Amit's grandfather, was born in Berlin in 1927. He went to school in Germany for two years. At the age of eight, the family emigrated to Palestine. In Berlin they had owned the fashion store Hermann Gerson together with relatives producing "Berliner und deutsche Mode". The first boycott of Jewish shops was already on April 1, 1933, when SA-men were standing in front of the shop with posters: "Hier kaufen keine Deutschen" (No Germans buy in this shop). Those you did it despite of the warning, were photographed and put under pressure. Consequently the business went down and finally they fled from Germany in 1935. After World War II the German government decided to pay reparations to those who had lived in Germany, had survived or had lost relatives in the Shoah. It was a very complicated matter, but the Freudentberg family received 5.000 Deutschmark in 1956. The family used the sum to travel through Europe.



For young Germans it's strange listening to Israelis who still speak their mother tongue. Although Yoel speaks Ivrit and English, he often switched over to German to explain something to the German project members, "I can't escape my Jeckes home country". His father had fought in World War I for Germany, felt more as a German than a Jew, but the growing and violent antisemitism in Germany made them emigrate to Palestine. The situation there was a shock. The family wanted to lead a productive life, the parents were idealists and Zionists. They joined the first moshav in Israel, Nahalal, founded in 1921, not far away from Nazareth.



They were not used to farming and physical work, but there was no other choice. He compares the hard manual work with the milking robots nowadays, which is "nearly no work". Malaria made life extremely dangerous, but after some time they got over it and could buy swamp land, which they cultivated and where Yoel has been living until now. "I had good and bad times with Arabs", he tells us. Times changed from friendly meetings and cooperation with Arab neighbours to clashes with attackers, who shelled a Moshav near the Egyptian border, where he lived for some time. Yoel still makes differences between people, he warns us, "Generalizations are dangerous at any time". He was happy when the dangers were nearly over after 1948, but he says, "Nothing good has come out of all the wars".

"Generalizations
are dangerous
at any time"



He personally believes in Jewish religion, but he doesn't like the extreme way of worshipping. In Germany he just knew that he was Jewish, but it didn't really mean anything. When the Nazis came into power, the situation changed, "Aryans" recognized that he was circumcised.

Yoel has got five daughters, he tells a joke, "Don't be unhappy with five daughters, it's much better to have five daughters than five daughters-in-law".

He is convinced that women and men must have equal rights, but because nature has decided that women have the babies, women have a different attitude towards education and household. He has translated all the documents for his descendants from German into Ivrit. His wife comes from a Polish family, that emigrated into the Ottoman Empire around 1900. He explains us, "She was a Palestinian Jew".

The Middle East on the Couch? Interview with the psychologist Ruben Vider



Ruben is a Jewish psychologist who was born and raised in the United States, but now lives in Jerusalem. He studied social work in Edinburgh and then he came to Israel, met his wife and stayed there. He worked in the army with traumatised Israel soldiers. Nowadays he works together with a Palestine woman (Susan). They work with young people (mostly women) from Israel and Palestine to get to know each other and to see each other as persons not as enemies.

Ruben says, "It is possible to hate and to like a person at the same time. You can say: I like you as a person, but you belong to people that are terrorizing me".

He works together with Susan with young women from both sides. They try to find similarities within the groups. They deal with art and art projects to communicate about their problems.

Ruben, "Israeli women are expected to work, Palestinians are supposed to be a mother and housewife. But it is necessary to be well educated. You can be whatever you want to be. It is an obligation to go and fight for equality between men and women. Why should men tell women what to do and not to do?"

You can hate and like a person at the same time

"There are young women on both sides that struggle with the same problems. Young women want to work and to be free. They want to have a free choice of profession and a

free choice of lifestyle."

"In Palestine the families say what women should think and do and in Israel the army says what women should think and do."

"There is a lot of pressure for men and women in my country (Israel) to go to the army. I'm part of a country that occupies others. We want to survive, but that's no excuse for occupation. I want to live here, but I also want Susan to live here as a Palestinian citizen."

Ruben's wife works in a public organisation of human rights that fight against tortures against Palestinians and Israelis. "We have a constant struggle between the organisation and the society. It is extremely important that the public sees what is happening. To live here means to live with dissonances and conflicts."

Young women want to be free

Ruben says, "This whole conflict is like an onion. There are so many layers to peel off until you reach the core - the individual with his/her human rights. We train our patients to be human. But if we reach the core of the onion, human rights are at risk at the same time, as all the protective skins have gone."



"The honour of a girl is like glass" Interview with Faten Mukarker



Faten's parents emigrated together with her and two brothers from Beit Jala to Bonn, Germany. She was born in 1956, attended a German kindergarten, a German school, had German friends, spoke only German. Until she was 12, she felt like a German, but with her beginning puberty a lot changed. Her father, grown up in an Arab civilization, forbade her going out of the house alone. She finished her secondary education with 16 and became a doctor's assistant. In 1975, when she was nearly 20, her parents took her back to their family's hometown. Her future husband was already waiting for her: Faten wanted to talk to him first. She did it even three times, completely unusual for a woman at that time. Her mother explained her the sentence "The honour of a girl is like glass, nobody can fix broken glass together, no family member will be able to walk through Bei Jala with his/her head raised". At last she agreed to get married. "Many of my German friends are divorced, I still live with my husband", she says. We met Faten in Germany. Today she lives in Beit Jala, has two daughters and two sons and wrote a book about her life: "Life between borders".

In our interview we concentrate on the role of women in Arab civilization. Faten points out that women in Palestine have to fight against two fronts: Against the patriarchal system, dominated by men and religion, and against the restrictions of her personal freedom by occupation within the Middle-East Conflict. She misses the clear distinction between state and religion. Even though she is a Christian Palestinian, she has to fight for her rights in a traditional Arab society. Many Muslim and Christian women don't want to be restricted to kitchen, children, church, as this way of life is called in Germany. She feels that the society sometimes steps forward, but then again backwards. It also makes a difference where you live, whether in Ramallah, Bethlehem or Beit Ummar. Most of the students who study abroad, do not return home. At universities nearly 60% of the students are female, but only about 10% find a job.

Equality through education?



The chance to work in Israel has nearly come to a standstill.

So what can a woman do when she has got excellent diploma?

Arab traditions, that sons care for their parents and that daughters move into the husband's household, is still valid. Faten's two sons: One has emigrated and didn't come back, the other one, Kamal, studied in Germany and is now a tourist guide. In excellent German and playing flute he guided us through Bethlehem and read out of his mother's book. At that time we didn't know the family ties between the two.

"They are like us", Faten tells us about Israelis: Both peoples went through various traumata, on one side the Shoah, the fight for the state of Israel, the other side the Nakba, the loss of their Palestinian homeland. Neither side knows enough about the neighbour's history and emotions. Faten watches a new generation growing up without sufficient knowledge about the other side, many Palestinian children only experience Israelis as

soldiers or aggressive settlers. Additionally the wall prevents personal contacts.

We ask again about the "broken glass" metaphor, as it seems to be one of the crucial points in the relation between men and women: Her brother or her sons do not risk to lose reputation, they are allowed to do nearly anything, but the daughter's honour must be "white", this is at the same time the family's honour. Now we understood the great pressure of our female project participants, who admit similar aspects in many private talks late in the evenings. One girl - she doesn't want to be mentioned - says it clearly: "Everything circles around our virginity".

So what to do?

Faten sees a solution in education. If you educate a woman, then you educate a boy and a nation at the same time. If mothers educate a boy not to feel like a boss or prince then there might be chances on a long-term basis.

We were impressed by Faten's optimism and her ability to express her emotions in a calm and never aggressive way. She is always able to see the other side as well and never loses her dignity as a Palestinian woman.

Neve Shalom - Stopping the philosophy of hatred

In the 1970s the Dominican monk Bruno had the idea of Israelis and Palestinians living in peaceful coexistence. The Trappist Monastery nearby gave the founders land to build up this model village. Today 60 families with different religions live there. The whole conflict is always hovering above the village: Palestinians feel that they do not belong to the state of Israel, although both groups are indigenous and both believe that they have the right to live in this part of the world. Israel is a Jewish state, Palestinians are not a nation until now, they are dominated by Jewish law, the state symbols are Jewish, the main language is Hebrew. "Equality is only on paper", Howard explains us, "Jews are a minority in the Middle East, Palestinians are a minority in Israel".

The institutions within the village are based on the principles of peace and understanding. The result of many years is that each group has to learn as much as possible about the other group to overcome mistrust, stereotypes and prejudice.

They teach the members that they have the power to change something - even as individuals. They make role plays about symbols, army service, the national anthem. The community wants a change on a grassroots level, on an individual basis. They demonstrate together against attacks from settlers, who paint racist slogans on the gates of the school. "Respect requires knowledge about the other culture, prejudice result from a lack of familiarity, the phobia against Jews or Arabs is widespread".

The members are mostly secular, there is no church, mosque or synagogue, but a spiritual "House of Silence". No holy book rules over the members, decisions are taken democratically and on the principles of human rights. There are problems of course, e.g. how to celebrate "The Nakba" or the "Independence Day", how to mourn over a killed Jewish soldier. But after long discussions "we agree not to agree".

That makes this village unique.



Picture Gallery - Neve Shalom



Commentary (author's name missing)

...Allegedly, Neve Shalom looks like a utopian town where Jews and Arabas have found the right way to live a life of peace and cooperation, but throughout the conversation we have clarified things. Neve Shalom can take place only with a certain type of people, people with similar political opinions. Neve Shalom is pretending to be representative or a role model. In my view this is not correct.

During our conversation we encountered one significant story which represents all life in Neve Shalom. On Independence Day celebrations and parties are not like in the rest of Israel and on Memorial Day there is no ceremony. The reason is, that they didn't find a proper way to address these important days: "Each family can perpetuate its nationality privately at home", Howard and Esther tell us.

During our tour through the village we didn't see any Israeli or Palestinian flag. Residents have found a solution for living together, only if you give up your patriotism and your love for your country. By denying your identity and nationality one can live in partnership and be involved in other issues, such as which shape will take the main building - a triangle or a circle?

Neve Shalom is a very brave and unique community, but pretending to be a role model is absurd for me.

"In war I need to turn my opponent into a monster"

Half way from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem is a little bubble hovering over the conflict in the Middle East: There lies a little village, where Palestinian and Israeli families live together in peace. It's the community 'Neve Shalom', meaning „oasis of peace“. About 60 families of both cultures live in this place and they want to become even more. All united by the dream of peace, they want to work for changes in their country. They committed themselves to a bilingual, binational peace-school and interreligious encounters. A glimmer of hope? A microcosm as a promising model for a whole country?

So the ideal of living together in peace does not stay an exceptional phenomena, the citizens therefore try to spread their principles far and beyond their small community by peace-lessons. At this moment the schools in Neve Shalom are visited by ca. 150 children, about 90% of them do not live inside the little community but come from the surrounding area. Lessons are given in Hebrew as well as in Arabic. Also the exchange about culture and traditions, as constituent elements of each identity, play an important role for the co-existence. Also further education for pedagogues, encounters for women, courses for intermediators etc. are organized to make meetings possible, where the conflicting parties can learn together, from each other and about each other. The citizens not only want to be a role model, but also try to influence a broader part of society by education and information.

Growing up together shall enable the pupils to see the other as an individual and not getting to know him as an enemy in the first place. But what happens, when they leave the peaceful microcosm and daily experiences with the other culture become dominated by the conflict and less by peaceful and friendly encounters? Palestinian youths usually continue their educational efforts, go to university, maybe get married and build up a family. Whereas almost every Israelis starts the military service in the IDF, a 2-3 year break instructed by the state of Israel. So after school both sides make very different experiences and start to depart from each other.



So we meet Mr. Q, who served the army as a psychologic consultant for several years and now works together with a muslim colleague for a social project. 'As much as I like you on a personal level, but you occupy my land!' says his partner when it comes down to their position in the conflict. So as soon it is about territory, politics, history and room for living, all personal appreciation is moving into the background. Fear and tendency to defend the own claims start to dominate every form of communication. In the lasting history of the conflict, hatred was passed on from generation to generation; prejudices rather increased than negative experiences faded. 'In war I can't see the opponent as an individual. I need to turn him into a monster in order to protect myself.' This kind of

depersonalization is in large parts also spread by educational means. In case of a battle or uncontrolled situations, this principle is there to be a constant point and to give orientation, so one does not have to make decisions about who's good and bad every time anew. Unfortunately Israel and Palestine have been in such a state of insecurity for its time being.

Doesn't this act against the education for peace?

In the bubble of Neve Shalom we find tranquility and balance. Sitting together with tea and cookies the community members explain us that their kind of pluralism implies that they sometimes have to agree, that they're sometimes not sharing the same opinion. So this example seems not to be so easy to transfer to the conflict between Palestinians and Israeli in a whole. But does that mean that peace education shall only stay in the hands of idealists living a dream far away from reality?

Even though this village does not reflect and represent the variety of the Israeli-Palestinian society, because in Neve Shalom only those meet, who really want to live together, it is all about those kind of people, who do want to live in peace.

If Neve Shalom can be transferred into a bigger project, is not really important. But they show that living together is possible even if there are differences and conflicts, if you are willing to invest into a common project, hang on to ideals and spread the idea of peace. So peace education is not in vain. On the contrary: It's even more important to reach more people to stop the increasing philosophies of hate.