

## At Camp—The Middle East

The decade-old pioneering efforts of "Seeds of Peace" in Maine and "Building Bridges for Peace" in Colorado are the premier summer camp youth experiences that usually come to mind when you think about camps where listening and dialogue about peace is prized. Few realize that there are now a dozen camp experiences that bring Palestinians and Jews together in North America.

"Thank you for allowing us to write about possible help for our exemplary, proven model of authentic hope for the Middle East, U.S. campuses and cities, and the world," began grantee Camp Tawonga about their Oseh Shalom-Sanea al-Salam Family Peacemakers Camp. The camp weekend experience began in 2003 near South Lake Tahoe, California, when 45 adults, 24 youth and 50 staff shared art and Middle Eastern meals, talked long into the night, hiked together—in short, made vital connections. In 2005, the camp convened 140 Palestinian, Muslim and Jewish youth and adults, males and females. The next camp is planned for September 2006, bringing together over 200 Jewish, Muslim and Palestinian youth, parents and other adults traveling from Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, Nablus, Jenin, Neve Shalom ~ Wahat al-Salam Petach Tikva, Kfar Kassem, Mis-gav, Sakhnin, Ramallah, Beit Sahour, Hebron, Gaza, Tokyo and across America. They will build and sustain relationships, discover cross-generational wisdom, and train for citizen leadership. A public report-out in San Francisco follows the weekend of learning and discussion.

The arts are very important to the camp, making people, including "enemies", connect. Classical chamber music, ethnic music and dance, mealtime spiritual melodies, and spontaneous fireside talents feed an atmosphere of cultural freedom. All week

there is a Family History Corner to share participants' photos, heirlooms and art objects. The camp offers many opportunities for hearing each other's perspectives, even on difficult issues. In the stone amphitheater where Shabbat services are usually held, participants discuss such contentious issues as the fate of Jerusalem and the Palestinian right of return. Jewish and Arab children of the participants, often playing together, provide a glimpse of what the future could look like.



Last year Arab and Jewish families of Peace Child Israel attended from Sakhnin and Misgav. This year will include their dedicated Tel Aviv-Jaffa partners, as well as determined youth of Nablus. Also invited are Israelis and Palestinians involved in the conflict who have turned their faces away from violence and toward one another. Sitting by the Tuolumne River, after a final ceremony in which Jews and Arabs washed each other's hands in the water, one participant remarked last year, "In the back of my mind, I keep thinking about how we could be hurting each other, but here we are smoking cigarettes and making jokes about Americans. We both want the same things, to fall in love and have kids. It's magical that it can be so different than it used to be."