



Educators Bridge

Fellows:

Moshe (Kinley)Tur–Paz | Director of the Jerusalem district for the Ministry of Education and is the head of the education department for the Jerusalem Municipality

Riki Siton | Head of the "Chevruta" Project for encouraging ties between Haredi and secular Israelis. As part of the project, individuals from each community have a weekly one on one phone call to better get to know one another and learn from each other.

The Haredi community has chosen a path of insularity and separatism. Therefore, secular society finds it convenient to ignore them as a whole. We cannot tolerate this mutual hatred. This separation between the Haredi community and the rest of the Israeli public presents an existential threat to Israel's future. Today, Israel's younger education system is made up of nearly twenty five percent Haredi children, and over the coming years, the Haredi community will only continue to grow in number.

There are currently several attempts being made at bridging the Haredi–Secular gaps. There are institutes for training school principals. There are groups focused on bringing Haredi and secular people face to face. But no–one is connecting Haredi and secular values. Principals are social leaders: they each influence dozens of teachers and hundreds of students and parents. If we succeed in changing their perspectives and creating social initiatives led by school principals, we will be able to bring about significant change in relations between Israel's Haredi and secular communities.

We have started a focus group made up of four school principals, two secular and two Haredi, and they have become a steering committee. They have agreed to carefully follow our lead, at great potential risks within their communities.

With their help, we hope to establish a group of forty principals and school coordinators, half Haredi, half secular, with two separate groups, one for women, one for men. Together they will attend ten meaningful, four–hour long sessions led by a Haredi moderator and a secular moderator.

They will develop joint initiatives, one initiative per group of four principals, from both sectors. These initiatives will then be implemented within their respective educational institutions and communities. The joint initiatives are aimed at the benefit of the local geographic community level. For instance: Two schools in Jerusalem will take it upon themselves to increase sanitation/security conditions for their fellow schoolmates.

Once the process is complete, we will have forty influential figures operating as agents for change from within

their communities. They will have created ten cross–sectoral initiatives within Jerusalem. Their initiatives and ideas will be disseminated among approximately one thousand school teachers!

Those who will carry out the initiatives and those who will experience them first hand will change their perspectives and their minds regarding the other sector, and their conceptions of each other will change. Thus, we will demonstrate that inter–sectoral connections can indeed be made, and this will create ripples of change within the two communities, among principals of other schools and within the Ministry of Education and other education systems in Israel. We will prove that it can be done.

The next phase of the project will be to expand and have dozens of groups of principals. The principles will remain the same as before. Twenty principals and coordinators per group – ten secular and ten Haredi. Each group of four will create a joint initiative. Each initiative will trickle down from the principal to the fifty or so school teachers in his/her school. In this way we will reach hundreds of principals and thousands of teachers.

The initiatives will create a new atmosphere in the schools. Some will become independent initiatives that will stimulate bonds between secular and Haredi people. The Jerusalem Municipality, the "Havruta" organization, and other institutes are showing interest in the initiative and will become administrative and financial partners of ours on this journey. The Ministry of Education will also partner in the future. We believe in this path. School principals are an untapped resource for bringing about meaningful social change. Many principals have already expressed great interest in our initiative. Four such principals already form our steering committee and they will assist in recruiting the first forty pioneers, and many more will follow in their footsteps. We believe that animosity is not a predetermined destiny for our society, that the methodology of meetings and initiatives effectively changes perspectives and that we will know how to recruit many more to our cause. We have done so on a small scale, each in his respective organization. Now, the time has come to take this initiative to the next level and turn it into a groundbreaking course of action.