



## SAFA – the "Social Cohesion Network"

**"He who alienates those that are distant to him is destined to alienate those that are close to him"**

Fellows:

**Itay Yavin** | Regional director for Haifa and northern Israel at the Hartman Institute Be'eri Program and co-founder and director of Be'eri 's "Min HaBe'erot" program.

The program brings together Jewish, Muslim, and Christian school teachers and principals to address areas of conflict through study of traditional religious sources

**Rabbi Ilay Ofra** | Educator and a psychologist. Rabbi of the "Kvutzat Yavneh" Kibbutz since 2009, and teaches in various educational institutions. In addition, as a Rabbi and a psychologist, he focuses on promoting healthy sexuality within the religious society.

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A language for creating a connective and tolerant moral discourse on the social networks.

The social networks offer fertile soil for shallow, racist, and aggressive dialogue where anyone with a keyboard can express his opinion on any topic in brief and without filters or restraint. It is a great challenge to successfully create a positive and cohesive dialogue on this media. Since the social networks are today's "village pump" where most dialogue occurs and even some fates are sealed, the need to handle the challenges they pose in a responsible and ethical manner grows more immediate by the hour.

Our initiative aims to provide a long-term solution to these challenges.

Our goal for the initiative is to connect educational figures, social activists, religious leaders, key opinion makers, and the media from every part of Israeli society and have them meet each other, establish a respectful dialogue, and learn about the complex cultural reality of Israeli society. "SAFA" participants will undergo training on activity on the social networks.

The initiative offers the unique combination of meeting the different voices out there with one another, and activism in the technological and online environments. Thus, we believe the initiative could help shape Israeli mentality and promote a dignified and unifying dialogue as a preferred alternative to the brutish and uncivilized one commonly found today. The combination of human life stories and the virtual world is inspired, among other things, by the "Humans of New York" project, which focused empathetically on the individual, his story, and his uniqueness.

Program participants will meet for weekly sessions over the course of a full academic year, or for a sequence of yearly seminars. Each session will consist of two main parts:

First – participants will be exposed to the cultural abundance provided by their fellow teammates who together will reflect and represent the diverse mosaic of Israeli society as a whole – Haredi, religious Zionists, secular, Arab Christians, Arab Muslims, and Druze. This will be done by studying formative texts together, learning about significant social projects, and establishing a moral dialogue regarding these topics.

Second – participants will attend classes and workshops given by key media figures and experts on social networks. These classes will provide the participants with tools to enhance their virtual influence online, as well as an opportunity to gain experience in writing meaningful and cohesive moral content for the media via social networks. Participants will be diligently active over a prolonged period of time.

The connections and dialogues among the participants will last for at least three years, by means of online meetings and face to face gatherings. The purpose of these meetings is to guide, direct and encourage their activity and their influence in the virtual world.

We hope to start three cycles over the next two years in campuses nationwide (North, Central, and South regions of Israel). Each cycle will consist of 25 participants. Our vision is that after a decade of running the program, with dozens of cycles and hundreds of graduates each with their own vast sphere of social influence online and offline, the public discourse in Israel's social media networks (including those that will exist in the future of which we cannot yet speculate) will have completely transformed.

"Safa" has already caused a media hype in Israel, and we are pleased to see the different efforts aimed at contributing to the success and fruition of our idea. There are several leading journalists from top religious Zionist and secular media outlets who are currently interested in joining as teachers in the program, and wish to help spread the word via the organizations where they work and are active.

In this way we hope to do our part in forming connections between the factions of Israeli society that are still very distant and separate from each other. We see that our society is torn and is struggling to form its identity, and we understand that our differences should be cherished, not discouraged, so we can enrich each other's lives and our society as a whole.