

Interfaith Day at Seminar Hakibbutzim College in Tel Aviv

Hod Ben-Zvi
January 6, 2016



Tel Aviv, Israel—On January 6, 2016 an interfaith conference was held at Seminar Hakibbutzim College of Education in Tel Aviv. The Jerusalem Interfaith Forum and Israel's Ministry of the Interior's Department of Religious Communities co-organized the event with the college. The conference, which comprised of class discussions and an interfaith panel, was attended by the college's rector and some 70 students.

Dr. Hanoch Ben Pazi, from the Jewish philosophy department of Bar Ilan University, moderated the discussions, focusing on the common peace values of the Abrahamic religions. He emphasized the importance of introducing the peace values of religions to students, who are the educators of the future.

The morning class discussion was dedicated to the common values of religions, and had more than 20 participants, including three lecturers from the college. Dr. Ben Pazi moderated a panel of four speakers: Sheik Salman Satel, imam of a mosque in Jaffa; Sheik Makhamid Wael, vice imam of a mosque in Jaffa, and a director of a senior school in Ramle; Rabbinit Esther Bar-Dea, wife of the former Chief Rabbi of Ramat Gan; and Dr. Nurit Hirschfeld, director of the Jerusalem Interfaith Forum, and secretary general of UPF-Israel.

The noon session was held in the main hall of the college. More than 70 students and teachers gathered to listen to an interfaith panel on the topic: "Could it be that the Road to Peace Goes through Meetings among Religions?" A discussion, then a Q&A session, led by Dr. Ben Pazi, followed. The speakers of the panel were: Fr. Masoud Abu-Hatoum of the Wedding Church in Kafr Kana; Sheik Samir Aasi, imam of Al-Jazar mosque in Acre; Sheik Nizar Khatib, head of the Druze department in the Department of Religious Communities in the Ministry of the Interior; Rabbi Yitzhak Bar-Dea, former Chief Rabbi of Ramat Gan; and Dr. Hirschfeld.

The afternoon session was dedicated to the subject of the sacredness of human life and the respect for human beings in the Holy Scriptures. About 20 students came to listen to Sheik Aasi and Rabbi Edgar Nof, director of Bridges for Hope, a non-profit, and rabbi of the reform community in Netan-ya. The two religious leaders maintain a brave and honest friendship, and expressed a strong commitment to love and to the value of respecting the other. Dr. Ben Pazi concluded by saying that the prophets' visions for peace can all be summed up with the very "small" things in life: respect one another; honor your neighbor; and be merciful in your everyday life with your family, your students, your neighbors.

At the end of the day, the students thanked the organizers: some, in tears, for the hope they gained; others, for the new dimension that was brought to their concept of peace.

At the end of each session, a certificate was awarded to the speakers by the colleges' students association, which was also involved in organizing the conference.