

**THE SUSIYA
CREATIVE &
LEARNING
CENTER**

מרכז סוסיא ליצירה ולמידה
مركز سوسيا للابداع والتعلم





A FEW WORDS ON SUSIYA



- DIFFICULT CLIMATE CONDITIONS
- SETTLER HARASSMENT
- EXPULSION AND DESTRUCTION OF HOMES BY THE ARMY
- CONNECTION AND COOPERATION WITH ACTIVISTS

South Hebron Hills is one of the most beautiful and most difficult parts of Palestine. Its nights are cold in the winter and what little rain there is does not nourish the fertile ground; the summer days are hot, and its wells are parched. The residents of the area live in extreme poverty in very basic conditions, without adequate infrastructure for electricity, water, and transportation. This situation is partly the result of neglect by the Palestinian Authority, but first and foremost, the Israeli occupation is to blame. The occupation has made the lives of the residents unbearable: the residents of South Hebron Hills constantly are harassed by the settlers, threatened with demolition of their homes, and expulsion from their land by the army or the civil administration; above all, they are denied the freedom of movement and the right to make an honorable living.

Susiya is located in the southernmost part of the West Bank, about 15 kilometers south of Hebron. For years, the residents of Susiya suffered immensely under the Israeli occupation. In 1986, Israeli authorities expelled the residents, who then were living in caves, after nearby archaeological ruins were declared a national archaeological park. They then settled on their land, located between the archaeological site and the Israeli settlement of Susiya, until 2001 when the army returned and destroyed their homes and their wells and again expelled the residents. This time they also did not give up, and with the help of individuals and Israeli organizations, they appealed to the Israeli High Court, which gave them a temporary injunction order allowing them to return temporarily to their land. In 2007, this order was annulled. Recently, the residents of Susiya appealed again to the High Court to claim rights to their land. In the decade that has passed, the village has created ties with Israelis and internationals, and Susiya has become well known among those interested in the fate of the cave dwellers of the South Hebron Hills.

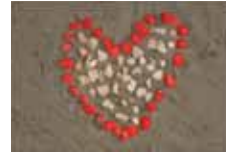
THE CREATIVE LEARNING CENTER



- A PLACE FOR LEARNING AND CREATIVITY INSPIRED BY THE DAY-TO-DAY LIFE IN SUSIYA
- DEVELOPS TIES BETWEEN PALESTINIANS, ISRAELIS AND INTERNATIONAL VISITORS
- CHALLENGES THE ISRAELI POLICIES OF SEPARATION
- VISION TO EXPAND THE PROJECT TO OTHER COMMUNITIES

Since 2010, the Susiya Learning and Creativity Center has promoted learning and creativity inspired by, and integrated with the daily life in Susiya. It encourages creative means for dealing with the Israeli occupation as well as social and local problems. In addition, the Center develops ties among Palestinians, Israelis, and visitors from abroad. It encourages visitors to confront a complicated reality, and enables the different peoples to see each other in a more humane way and even as partners. While the Villages Group first initiated the idea of the Center, since then the Center has become a cooperative effort of Palestinians, Israelis, internationals, social activists and educators.

Today, after a year of work, the Center is open, and we aim for it to be self-managed. We hope that the establishment of the Center in Susiya and the experience gained during the process will help us to create additional centers in other parts of South Hebron Hills in the distant future.



ACTIVITIES OF THE CREATIVE LEARNING & CENTER

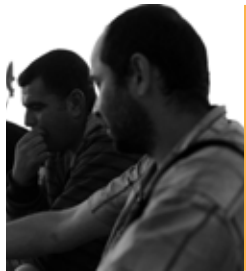


- DEVELOPMENT OF DIALOGUE BETWEEN THE TWO PEOPLES
- FUNDING THE FIRST STAGE
- BECOMING SELF-MANAGED AND SUSTAINABLE

During the months of its activities, the center in Susiya has developed a number of projects for empowering the residents and promoting dialogue between the two peoples: Arabic lessons for Israelis and Hebrew lessons for the residents, art workshops, and additional activities are currently being developed. This is a challenge for the community of Susiya and its friends, and all of us have faith in its potential, but we know that it cannot be realized on its own. All of the programs in the Center are based upon the model of minimal expenses, self-funding, and sustainability. A group of local Palestinian and Israeli activists and international partners, has accompanied the first stage of building the project, and it requires initial funding from outside. The Center is planned so that it will be able to function independently and to develop additional programs on its own. In order to operate the Center, to maintain it, and develop the activities there, an operating budget is needed, partly based on internal income and partly on fundraising from outside.



ANA BAHKI ARABI



- ENRICHMENT OF SPOKEN ARABIC AMONG ISRAELIS AND INTERNATIONALS
- MEETING OF THE TWO PEOPLES
- INCOME FOR THE RESIDENTS
- ISRAELI AND INTERNATIONAL PRESENCE AS A MODERATING FACTOR IN FACE OF THE ARMY AND THE SETTLERS

One of the first activities that we are developing in the Center is a program designed to enrich the spoken Arabic skills of Israelis and internationals who are not native Arabic speakers. The program that we created enables Israelis and internationals to be hosted for several days by families in Susiya where they can practice their Arabic with the families, most of whom speak only Arabic. In addition to creating personal ties between the people, and exposing the participants to daily life in the community, the program brings the families of Susiya some additional income. Moreover, the presence of Israelis and internationals in the area during the program helps to moderate the attitude of the settlers and the army towards the people of Susiya.

The host families provide their guests the opportunity to participate in their daily activities, such as sheep herding, cooking, or resting with the family. Beyond the ongoing conversation with the host family, a specific number of hours are devoted to practicing Arabic conversational skills with one of the family members or with another person from the village. The guests pay the host families in exchange for the Arabic lessons, with part of the income going to develop the Center.



The weekend is full of new experiences. I learned so much about the life there. I fell in love with the place and with the people who live there, and since then, I feel very connected to them. Alla D.

The stay in Susiya was a new experience for me. Living with the family transformed the learning experience into more personal and exciting one. For a long time I had searched for a framework where I could have real conversation in Arabic and staying with the family enabled this. I warmly recommend it to people with a background in Arabic, who do not usually meet Arabic speakers. Eran N.

I think that I will never forget the weekend that I spent in Susiya with my daughter when we learned Arabic with one of the families. The people were great and very quickly I felt part of the family. Despite the difficult physical conditions and the heartbreaking political situation, I hope to return for another weekend. Ela G.

LEARNING HEBREW



- MEETING AND GETTING TO KNOW THE TWO PEOPLES
- EMPOWERING THE RESIDENTS
- KNOWING THE LANGUAGE OF THE OCCUPIERS

While the Center helps Israelis to improve their Arabic language, many residents in Susiya are eager to learn new languages, especially Hebrew. The ability to speak Hebrew can open up opportunities for work, for negotiating with the army or settlers, while it also helps to build bridges. Most of the people of Susiya do not have opportunities to meet Israelis and speak with them, as they are forbidden to enter Israel. The situation of the men is better as some of them work with Israelis, while the women know only a few words in Hebrew. The Center provides an opportunity to learn Hebrew. The lessons take place once a week and are given voluntarily by Israeli teachers. Yael, one of the teachers, says "I never had such devoted students and so eager to learn. My students are not willing to stop the lesson even after 2.5 hours!"



CREATIVITY WORKSHOPS



- INSTILLING A SPIRIT OF CREATIVITY
- SHARING LOCAL KNOWLEDGE
- EXPANDING HORIZONS
- MEETING WITH ARTISTS

Sharing information and ideas are central to the Learning and Creativity Center in Susiya. The Center enables individuals from Susiya and elsewhere to share with the residents their knowledge in different fields: art, ecology, standard of living, and so forth. The Center has held a wide range of workshops: a British ceramics artist taught the residents to sculpt, artists taught face painting, designing with clay, building kites, video photography, animation, and more. The Center has held film screenings by turning the Center's tent into a local movie theater. The residents also learned new techniques to purify water, and met with bio-gas experts. We hope to expand the fields of learning and art, with creativity and learning being essential to developing a person's spirit and to expanding knowledge.



INSHALLAH

These projects are still in the early stages of development, and are the result of ongoing conversations with the community of Susiya.



Cultural Weekends: It's our hope to hold cultural weekends on a monthly basis: meetings with storytellers in Hebrew and Arabic, film festival, musical performances, open stage events, theatrical performances, both professional and amateur, poetry readings and so forth. It's important to host both artists from Palestine and Israel in the Center, and to give expression to unknown artists who will establish themselves through the Center.



Susiya Festival: The Center intends to hold a yearly festival for the people of Susiya to highlight the activities of the Center through art work and different activities: lectures, film screenings, puppet theater, and so forth. This is an empowerment event, giving expression to local knowledge and exposing guests and the residents themselves to the work of the Center, emphasizing both individual and collective success. We see this event, to which Palestinian, Israeli, and international friends of Susiya will be invited, also as a means of fundraising for the Center.



Internet and computers: the residents of South Hebron Hills crave communication with the world around them, but the possibility of connecting to the internet is not easy, as during most of the day, there isn't sufficient electrical supply. We estimate that with a small investment, the Center can provide used computers with internet access, and that their use would also generate some income for the Center, while also expanding the social meeting points in the community. Nasser: the entire world is progressing, and we do not want to be left behind. It's important to me that the people in Susiya learn to use computers.



WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Visit Susiya on a weekend and practice spoken Arabic
- Organize activities, artistic or otherwise (such as a lecture, language lessons, ecological workshop etc) to share your knowledge with the people of Susiya
- Publicize the Susiya Center with your friends and family, tell them about the area, about their life under the Israeli occupation, about the Israeli policies of separation, and about the search for creative ways to undermine the occupation and its policies of separation.
- To fundraise for the Center in your work place and in educational institutes. Hold a house meeting, a small party, a fundraising concert, or a lecture by one of the activists from the Center. We will be happy to be your guest and speak at any event that is organized.
- We are happy to accept donations: materials, art supplies, portable computers, projector, dictionaries, grammar books, and literature in Arabic, Hebrew, and English for children and adults.
- The Center operates in an unpredictable reality. We try to reduce the expenses and the dependency upon outside donations, so that the Center can exist on a minimal budget, and so that it can be rebuilt easily if the authorities destroy it. Despite this approach, the Center still needs funding, and every donation will be used to help firmly establish the Center.



This project was first initiated by the Villagers Group, active in Susiya since August 2005. The close knowledge and personal ties woven over time between the activists of the group and the Palestinian families living in Susiya have led to ongoing cooperation directed toward the development of the local community. This cooperation includes a number of projects: transporting children to the regional school, providing professional training to young women, financial support to university students, building solar and wind powered electricity, and more. The success of these projects during their implementation from 2006 and onwards has encouraged additional families, who were also among those exiled from their homes by the occupation forces, to return and settle again on their land in Susiya. The growth of the local population of Susiya (which previously was small and scattered), has created new possibilities for communal development for the residents of the area. The people of Susiya hope to realize these possibilities, among others, through the Center for Learning and Creativity, which aims to provide a variety of possibilities and creative means for self and social development.

For more information, to get involved in the Center, and/or to support the Center for Learning and Creativity, contact us by email:

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الأحد بالبحري
بمناه لله
بأرضه