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**Speaker Bios:**

**Shadi Abu Awwad, Rabbi Hanan Schlesinger**

**Shadi Abu Awwad** is a 28-year-old resident of the Palestinian city of Beit Ummar in the West Bank and one of the leaders of the Roots youth group. He studied graphic design for two years at Al Ahliyya Amman University in Jordan and in the past has worked as a building contractor. Until recently he was the recipient of a Roots scholarship which allowed to study at Bethlehem University.

Born into a family that took a major leadership role in the First Intifada (Palestinian uprising), Shadi was imbued from a young age with deep Palestinian patriotism and activism – and with hatred for Israelis. He was still a child when his family underwent a major transformation and became leaders of the Palestinian movement for reconciliation with Israel, and he grew up with both the hope that peace is possible and the determination to struggle to achieve it.

Shadi is invested in Roots because he believes that Roots provides a model for a solution to the conflict and for the type of connection that both Israelis and Palestinians desire: "The moment you pass through the gate and step into Merkaz Karama you are in a different world, a world in which all of us respect each other, love each other, and accept each other."

In his work with the youth group, Shadi facilitates shared encounters and experiences among Palestinian and Israeli teenagers, building a new generation of leaders who can confront the real problems between their communities while acknowledging each other's humanity.

Shadi’s unassuming leadership ability, deep insight, quiet charisma and winning smile have helped the Roots youth group becoming one of the shining stars of the Roots Initiative.

**Hanan Schlesinger** is an Orthodox rabbi, teacher, and passionate Zionist settler who has been profoundly transformed by his friendship with Ali Abu Awwad, Shadi’s uncle, and with other Palestinians. His understanding of the reality of the Middle East conflict and of Zionism has been utterly complicated by the parallel universe that Ali and others have introduced him to.

Originally hailing from New York, Rav Hanan made aliya (ascended to the Land of Israel) on his own at the age of 20 and has lived over the green line, in Alon Shvut, Gush Etzion, for over 35 years. He spent 10 years learning in Israeli Talmudic seminaries and also studied towards a MA in Jewish Philosophy at Hebrew University. His professional career has been dedicated to teaching Jewish studies in various colleges and seminaries in the Jerusalem area, and well as in different frameworks in Florida and Texas.

It was in Dallas about 10 years ago that he became involved in interfaith work, first with Christians and then with Muslims. There he founded Faiths in Conversation, a framework for Jewish - Christian – Muslim theological dialogue. The mind-expanding experience of these trialogues inspired him to attempt to meet Muslims and Christians back in the Holy Land.

Although always drawn to pluralism and deeply empathic for the other, and sporadically involved in the religious peace movement over the course of the past 3 decades, Rav Hanan had never formed a personal relationship with a Palestinian until he returned to Gush Etzion from Dallas about five and a half years ago. The meetings that began then have become far more meaningful than he could ever have imagined. He found himself part of the small team that founded Roots/Shorashim/Judur and has dedicated himself to bringing reconciliation to that tiny sliver of land that both Israelis and Palestinians call home.

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