

# World of Children Award, 2014

Chaim Peri Acceptance Speech

NYC, November 6<sup>th</sup>, 2014

Eight years ago, not too far from here, I met a very special human being, who has tragically departed from us far too soon – Anne Heyman, of blessed memory. In the face of the genocide orphan crisis in Rwanda, Anne was determined to establish an orphanage, an exemplary children's village that will go way beyond shelter and basic schooling; one that will truly be a life-changer for destitute kids.

Anne wanted to understand the secret of the Israeli youth village which raised and educated dispossessed and orphaned children to become shakers and movers of their country - Shimon Peres, the late Yitzhak Rabin, and actress Gila Almagor - Israeli 'grande dame' – to name but a few.

"There is NO secret", I recall telling Anne. "We didn't invent the wheel. We just stick to good old common sense, and everything revolves around that – just as in the renowned African proverb - *"It takes a village to raise a child"*.

"It takes a village..." conjures an ideal image of places where children are raised within an aura of **coherent** human interactions and **consistent** traditions - Margaret

Mead Samoa style. Yet even in the era of the global village, the way that the inner world of children is shaped has basically remained the same – and so, it still "takes a village to raise a child" – **But how?**

In a way, it's like in Roberto Benigni's unforgettable film 'Life is Beautiful', in which the child experiences normalcy within a most surreal environment, thanks to a **unifying context**: – a game of make-believe. By the same token, we raise children in carefully orchestrated environments which revolve around the unifying context of coherence, where bits and pieces of their brokenness have a fair chance to mend.

Our tried and true educational method titled the "*Village Way*" has been my life work over decades at Yemin Orde youth village. The *Village Way* is a careful reconstruction of essential elements that existed in the old village of humanity. It is about introducing humanness and simplicity into a chaotic and unpredictable existence, providing a solid platform for the child to develop a sense of self-worth and trust that the world is after all a good place.

The *Village Way* is about **de-institutionalizing institutions**. By and by, it addresses the emotional needs of caretakers and educators who all too often burn out, feeling they are part of an "assembly line". You cannot transform a child unless you transform yourself.

There is no lack in researches and reforms regarding the education of children at-risk. But - as Seymour Sarason would say: "in education, the more things change, the more they remain the same." Still, when it comes to transforming the fates of deprived children, it is my profound experience that the **unifying context** of coherence is the key.

*The Village Way* method for creating coherent educational environments in terms of time, space and value-laden content seeks to provide the critical mass needed to uplift children way beyond mere survival, so that every dollar invested in raising destitute children can go the extra mile.

In the spirit of this wonderful award, which I am so privileged to accept here today - life indeed should be beautiful for every child in this world. We are far from seeing this Messianic aspiration turn into reality, but as is said in Psalms - "Even a sparrow will find a home, and a swallow a nest for herself". (Psalms 84:4)

Fuelled by the World of Children award, and by all those who believe in our mission, we will continue to create *Village Way* nests from which at-risk children can spread their wings to live a life of merit.

Thank you.