



Breaking Barriers



DEAR HELGA

It's not that easy or simple to write in short after more than a decade of knowing each other and working together intensively.

When we started to work with you we were very young and somewhat rebellious. The situation was in the midst of the bursting of the second Intifada and the occupation was in the pick of its brutality. We felt the responsibility and the urgency in doing something NOW for our people and somehow to resist the occupation in our own way.

You were the one who saw it and gave us the shoulder and the support to do so, you believed in our way and recognized the importance and the possibilities in this not very orthodox set - two young people, without a frame or political connection, only with the stubbornness and the belief. Not many people would have done that but you did.

During the years we had a lot of seminars, ideas and experiments. You allowed us the ideological freedom of leading our own program. You trusted us to know what is right for our reality and respected that.

We did not always see eye to eye in everything and sometimes had bitter arguments. But we always knew that we have a stable abutment to rely on for our project to continue and a possibility to grow. We found in you the informal, radical, independent partner and supporter that is with us in the most deeper sense. We don't even know how to start thanking for that or how to express our appreciation, and we don't know how to imagine the project without your presence. As for us you are always a part of this project and will continue this connection.

With a lot of love and respect

Dear Helga

For many days now I am looking for the right words to express my feelings towards the project “Vacation from war”.

The more I think about it, there is one sentence that comes back to my mind over and over again, and here it is: This is the most important and meaningful thing I have ever done in my life. And this is the truth, Vacation from war gave me the opportunity to do the thing that is most important for me: to have a dialogue between Israelis and Palestinians. And not just an ordinary seminar; in “Vacation from war” we are given enough time and space and freedom to do it in the right and accurate way.

I am thinking about you Helga and I want to tell you clearly- you are the one who made it happen. Thanks to you hundreds of young people from Israel and Palestine could meet each other, could talk to each other, could make a change in their minds and in their reality. This is a huge thing. This is such a big thing... I just hope you know it Helga, I hope you know what an enormous thing you did all those years, what an amazing thing you gave us. I want to thank you so much for every thing you gave me. All this opportunity to do the thing that is most important for me, to really make a change. On the personal level I want to tell you how dear you are to me and how much I love you. I hope you know it. I think you do.



Dear Helga,

I want to thank you personally for the right to take part in the seminar few years ago, and later on to facilitate. It wasn't easy, but on the other hand, given the daily reality, it makes sense.

Unfortunately, I feel that since then, the situation became more complex and I hope that I the future will look different.

No doubt, the experience I had in the two seminars will be with me for the rest of my life. The opportunity to try talking and knowing more deeply the other side, although - and because of - the difficulties, is rare, and was first possible thanks to contribution of you and the people around you.

We didn't know each other very well, but it is hard not to notice your endless energies, your persistence and your giving to such a long and challenging process.

Many thanks, wishing you also some rest and joy in this time.

Dear Helga

I remember you coming to hear my lecture as a really young army refuser in 2001, offering me this opportunity that I did not even know its meaning at that time.

We would have done something anyway, but this connection was the beginning of something that since then has changed my life completely.

Breaking Barriers is the thing I had done in my life that I can say out loud I'm most proud of. I grew up with this project, with you in the background always. For me it was a central place to shape my political opinions, to challenge them, to do this hard work that I still believe in with all my heart.

Both of us are not the most easiest people on this planet. Maybe this is how it is with ideologists. And as one to another I love you and you are an inseparable part of my life.

You always believed in me.

I don't want to say thank you again, I prefer to say I love you.

Breaking Barrier experience has influenced my whole life. It is a mixture of great experiences in which I was able to freely convey my message to everyone and see the other side in the eye of human. Facilitating in young groups is my hobby in the first place, it became a mission with Breaking Barriers after I saw the progress and the cycle of understanding my countrymen go through. I believe it is the best place to be in for dialoguing between conflicting parties.



Throughout the Seminar I have experienced a lot of mixed feelings, because for me it was my first experience in such seminars, and I came to know new people and experience new things and get into hard debates.

I met new people from both sides, and I can't deny that both sides affected me and had a significant add to this experience; as collective two different groups first, but then each in his own way on as an individual perspective. For the first time I felt the closeness of the Palestinian villages and cities, I knew that no matter how far or separated we are, we still share the same culture and same belonging to our country, and each suffers his own way. I felt close than ever to Akko, Nazareth, Jenin, Nablus, Hebron, Tulkarm, Beit Lahm, Jericho, and all the others, I felt unity in our meetings and built up friendship. it felt so good that Palestine for me was once again restored as one despite the miserable reality that we faced when we were back.

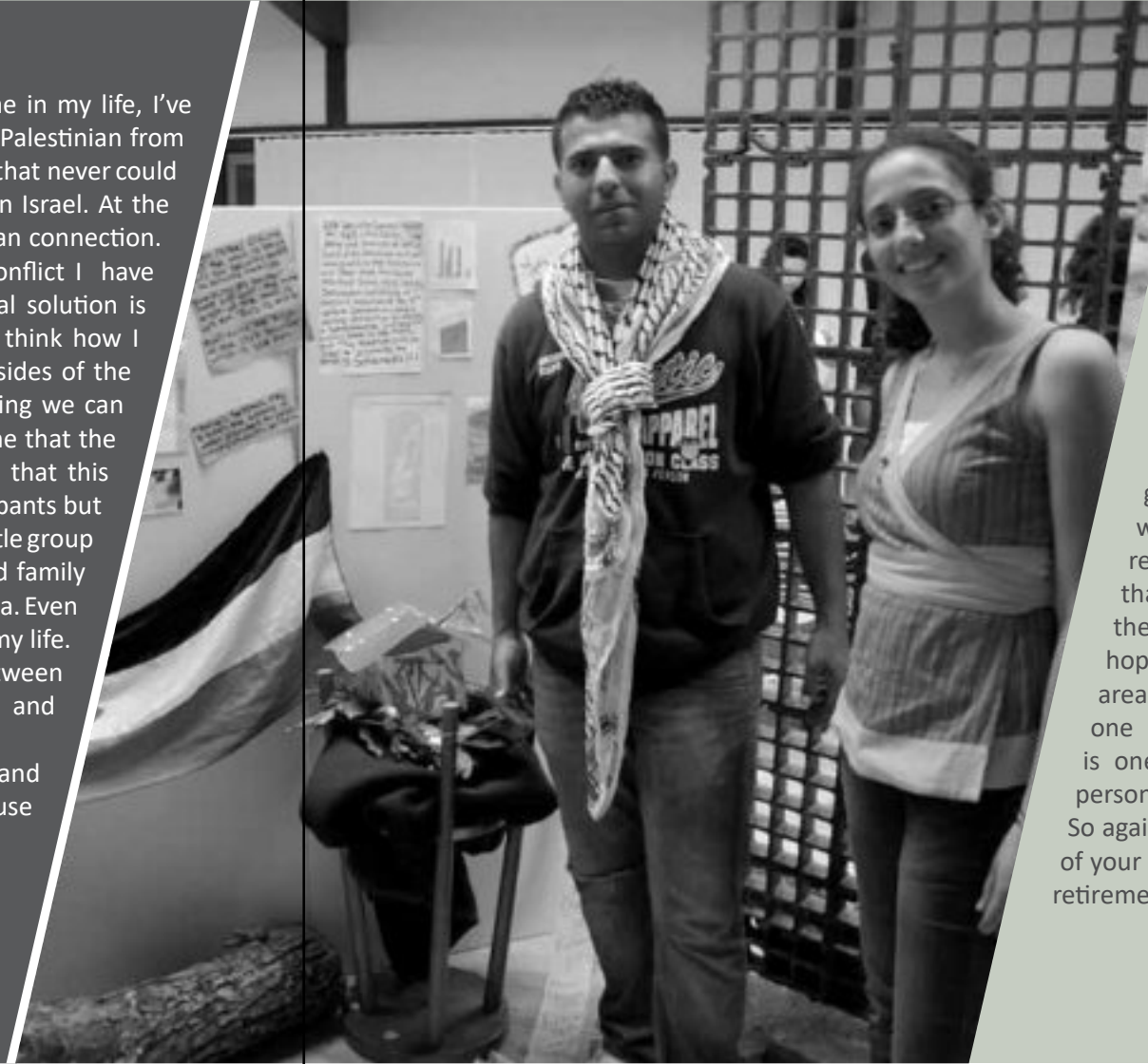
However, seeing the other side and his narrative made me think that for each truth there are two faces, one we might want to hide or avoid thinking of or looking at, and the other is the one I am living and obliged to see. The seminar taught that there are things we don't want to see, but if we want our side of the truth to be seen and recognized, we should be able to see the others' side of the truth.

This experience was transforming, not only for the people I met and the things we fought for, but for making me so jealous to start working towards making my country a better, safer, cleaner and a much organized country.



Vacation from war was definitely a life changing experience to me and to most of the participants. The nature of the dialogue sessions encouraged both sides to look beyond the facts and the norms we've learned back home, it gave us a chance to express ourselves and most importantly to listen and learn more. What makes this seminar a special one is that it brought Israelis and Palestinians who are willing to challenge realities. There were some obstacle at first, but I think the videos we watched and the ideas discusses in dialog succeeded in making people trust the process. We can't deny that it's not easy to talk and the conversations weren't tolerant, but when I saw that people accepted the fact that Palestinians are occupied and that we're not equal sides in this conflict, I knew everything we went through was worth it.

At the seminar, for the first time in my life, I've created a true friendship with a Palestinian from the West Bank. This is something that never could have happen in my ordinary life in Israel. At the seminar I faced the power of human connection. When it comes to resolving the conflict I have no hope in the leaders and political solution is something which is hard for me to think how I can assist it. But people, from both sides of the conflict, meet, talk , connect- that thing we can do. There is something important to me that the people behind Breaking Barriers knew that this experience is not confined to the participants but also goes to our family and friends. Our little group still meets occasionally; I met friends and family of my Palestinian new friends and vice versa. Even a year later, the seminar is very present in my life. I realize the power of the encounter between people which is large and creates change and undermines the dogmatic thinking. Thanks for the opportunity, the friendship and the significant experience I went through because of you.



Dear Helga.

I just wanted to say thanks, and I mean it, I truly thank you for the work you have done and your choosing to make breaking barriers possible. The seminars I took part in had a huge impact on my political (and otherwise) shaping. I feel very fortunate to have, today, a social life that includes many Palestinians, I believe having mixed social groups (and especially ones in which people have a critical stand regarding the politics in Israel but that's not the only thing keeping them together) is one of the few hopes for a better future in this area and I guess projects like the one you initiated and fostered is one of the best ways to help persons form this kind of joint lives. So again, thank you so much for all of your work and hope you'll enjoy retirement - they say it's great.

Breaking Barriers seminar was an important experience and certainly not an easy one. It made me understand how much there is to do for us to live in peace, but more important, it made me understand it is us who have the power to do it.

I've started teaching this year Middle East studies ninth- grade students in high school, and when I started the first lesson I said that in this classroom we will learn about Arabs. One student said she does not want to learn about Arabs and I asked why? And she said she does not like Arabs. A student sitting next to her told her "Sure you do not like them, the country makes you not love them,"- this idea is obvious but I never thought of it that way. In our textbooks studying history, in the media - the Arabs are our enemy. In this sense, the seminar made a correction. I and several friends who participated in the seminar can testify that this seminar is the first time we met a large group of Arabs who are not found in these textbooks/



Dear Helga,

The Israeli - Palestinian geography was supposed to create a reality in which human and everyday encounters between the two sides are trivial and obvious. But unfortunately it does not. Because of that Breaking Barriers - is rare and significant- enabling the simplest thing: human encounter between man and man, between woman and woman, between us and our history and conflict.

A huge thanks you for enabling us these meetings in a challenging environment yet safe and loved. Like many other goods, I carry with me the memory of those powerful sessions till today.

I can honestly say Breaking Barriers seminar was the first place where I met Palestinians not through force and violence like my military service and not through stereotypes like a typical Israeli, but as human beings. This was mainly a different experience for me. I came back from Germany with greater confidence that we need to work hard to end the conflict and that this work is worthy and that on the other side there are people who make exactly the same thing.

I've participated in a seminar of Breaking Berries and Vacation from War two years ago, then the seminar was held on a boat sailing across the Mediterranean sea. The Psycho thing is that I was sure that I haven't met Palestinians until I came to the seminar. And before the seminar I knew to say that there is occupation, but I could not tell what it means at all. The seminar has not given me the all knowledge, but he taught me to ask questions.

So thank you. It was an experience of a lifetime and one of the biggest things I've done in my life. Thanks to this experience I went to be a journalist in "Haaretz" newspaper, Research assistant in "The Committee against Torture", and now one of the speakers of "Breaking the Silence"

Dear Helga,

I've participated in Breaking Barriers seminar at 2007, 6 years ago and I still remember it very vividly.

It was one of the most meaningful things I've done.

It wasn't easy! it's never easy to face your own fears and obstacles, it's never easy to face a mirror. Nevertheless, I remember the powerful experience of meeting new people, people I'd never had the chance to meet in other circumstances, and listen to their stories. I tell myself what I've told then, I didn't do it to change the world, I came for the people and their stories, I also had the chance to tell mine.

I know that people who went that seminar were not the same after they've done it.

This is my experience and I wanted to thank you for that!



Dear Helga,

Thank you for all your work and support in Breaking Barriers. I was on one of the delegations five years ago. I think that those two weeks are still on my mind. I think I was there as part of a journey. I now work in an organization called «Breaking the silence» that works to expose the day to day reality of occupation through the eyes of former Israeli soldiers and work daily with Palestinian partners and friends. In that sense Breaking Barriers was my first step in breaking my silence. Your work was important for me to understand my role in this reality and take responsibility for my actions and my future.

Dear Helga:

To be honest, I am not always good at expressing myself neither in writing or speaking, but since this is related to you personally I will try to write. You have changed my life upside down, made me believe that there is always a path, despite it's difficulty; Your approach of dealing with me made me punctual and more organized. You are like a mother to me who gives me energy every time I hug, I really doubt if I can personally continue working without you being there for me. My confidence comes when you are around watching me. Please remember that I'm always there if you need me



from a family that suffered for years from the Israeli occupation I came to a vacation from war in 2004 with a great support from my father. My father was deported in 1974 to Lebanon then to Syria. He was suffering a severe damage in his eyes from torturing in the Israeli jails. After 19 years of deportee he returned back to his country as a goodwill from the Israeli negotiators in 1994. I went to Germany to see to understand and to know people from the other side. I still remember my emotional shakes when I talked about me, my family, and my suffering. I still remember the tears that fell from me and from the Israelis in my group. Still believing in the power that you gave me to return back to this program to build the bridges between two nations in need of justice and peace. Every year I have this chance in seeing people from both sides going through the process I went through. I believe in the power of the humanity. I am proud of my Israeli friends who are struggling with me to end the occupation as a starting point to reach peace together. As I am appreciated by my German friends (especially Hilga) for thinking in this program and for giving us this chance to meet and to work in such a program.

Dear Helga,

There are some people that you meet in life and they leave their positive stamp that goes with you all your life and makes you want to do the same to others. you have been like that in my life and I can just thank you and send you a very warm hug and tell you that in order to have a better world we need more and more people like you, and with your work you have plant a many seeds of good people that will continue your blessed way.

Thank you for everything, wish you the best health and the biggest smile in the world.

In many places I get surprises, in the bank, in the street, at social events,,,etc these surprises are human feelings, joy, happiness, and memories when I meet one of the participants of the Breaking - Barriers seminars, that makes my day. I am grateful to all the wonderful persons I've met and I am still meeting "Inshallah" I will be meeting them for life. When I see one of them changed in his body or her/his look; I'm thinking of the other changes! this is really unique experience. I thank the amazing -multicultural- stuff I worked with as a member of an exciting dynamic and before all as a friend. "

As always with respect and friendship



"Certain things in life meet us and cause us to think, to ask, and even change perception .." Such a thing was my experience as a participant in a seminar in 2009. I came to the seminar with certain thinking patterns, although there were no definite , but mainly influenced by the fact that I lived in a war zone (Sderot, region of Gaza) During the time that the two groups shared together- the Israeli and the Palestinian, I got to know the stories, the people and especially to understand that in the other side there are people. It was a meaningful experience for me, a foreign land, new people, everything was open. My natural feature of the connection, mediation and striving to life without wars, is also expressed in the seminar, and even I was elected to be the Prime Minister in the negotiation method! My views about the conflict change sometime based on the events in the region, but I opened the hatch to a clear understanding that we can not live here in a conflict, and one day we will have no choice but to live here in peace. I thank all those who happen to this seminar and first and foremost to Helga

