

Shalom Rav

A Blog by Rabbi Brant Rosen

From the Side of the Oppressed: A Guest Post From Palestine

Posted on [December 30, 2010](#) | [13 Comments](#)



Here is a guest post from Marge Frank, one of the participants from our trip:

Brant asked me to post on his blog, as the only Israeli-American on our tour, in order to add this perspective to the discussion. I am honored to do so, albeit a bit overwhelmed as to how to choose what to share. This has been the most amazing, depressing, overwhelming, and transformative experience of my life and I'm still reeling from the multitude of emotions I've experienced.

Let me begin by saying I lived and worked in Israel for fourteen years, from 1976 to 1990. My son did his army service from 1980-83. I remember him telling me stories of soldiers at checkpoints who would humiliate older Arab men and how sickened he was by this. In 1982, he was sent to fight during the war in Lebanon. Fortunately he survived, as did I, if barely.

My daughter, a social worker, lives in Jerusalem and creates training programs for professionals wh



When I lived in Israel, I worked as a social worker. As part of my job, I helped to build a transitional home for children at risk in Beersheva. During all that time, I never had any real encounters with Palestinians or spent any time on the West Bank. I made the weekly trip from Jerusalem to Beersheva on the road leading through Bethlehem, Hebron, etc., with never a thought or concern.

Over these past many years, to my shame and regret, I've remained semi-oblivious to the changes going on in the country. My years as a member of JRC, and in particular my relationship with Brant, slowly awakened me to the current tragic situation. Now I felt it urgent to see for myself what is actually happening on the ground in Israel/Palestine.

I'd like to share four experiences I had on our trip. The first occurred in the Deheishe refugee camp. When we first arrived, we stood on the roof of a house overlooking the camp and were told its history by a Palestinian resident. During his half hour presentation, a small 10 year old child stood next to him listening intently to every word. As a child therapist I was thinking no child should have to listen to this story, of course realizing this boy is living the story and not just hearing it.

It turned out that I would actually spend the next two nights in this child's home with three other women from our group. We were greeted by this beautiful family with incredibly warmth and hospitality. In addition to this child, Tamer, were three other children, a 13 year old girl and two younger children. Every time I sat down somewhere, Tamer came to sit beside me and put his arm around me, and we spent much of the evening hugging. Then he took me to one of the bedrooms where there was a computer and asked me if I would be his Facebook friend. His sister typed in my information and I'm now his proud friend (who of course can't understand anything he writes).

The next night I wasn't feeling well and had to forgo the return visit and return to the hotel. I was heartbroken because I hadn't said goodbye. The next morning, when we returned to the camp to pick up our group, I looked out the window to find my three cohorts, plus the father and Tamer coming to the bus to say goodbye. Many hugs and kisses (and tears from me) ensued and we were on our way.

Then there was our day in Hebron. Due to health issues, I needed to have a wheel chair when we did a lot of walking. The lovely men, and women, in our group, took turns pushing me. At one point I was pushed by a Palestinian man who knew our guides and when I turned to give him a tip he shook his head. Instead, gave me a gift of a key chain with the Palestinian flag logo on it.

I immediately attached my house keys to the key chain, but was told by our Palestinian tour guide Aziz that I should pack it in my suitcase because if it was found in my carry-on got at the airport, I would be interrogated about why I have it, how I got it, etc. I did as I was told, but thought to myself "why, as a Jewish Israeli-American am I not allowed to get a gift from a Palestinian man who was so kind to me?"

We also spent a night with families in Jenin. Our small group of five was greeted by the grandfather of the family, who lived upstairs, while his son and his family were downstairs. He took us to his apartment, and it was clear he was delighted to have us with them. Then we discovered he didn't speak any English, but his Hebrew was excellent – so I served as the translator for our group.



As he spoke, he went from charming, warm, and smiling to gradually more and more angry as he told us his story of going to work in the morning, coming to a checkpoint, and being interrogated by three questioners. The fourth told to take off all of his clothes except for his underwear. By this time, he was by this time so enraged he took off his underwear too. This has happened to him three times in the past few months. Once he was so agitated that he turned around and went home, never even getting to work. He never knows what time he will actually arrive to work each morning.

Then we went downstairs to the young family, again charmed by the warmth and adorable children, so well cared for, so loved, so smart and funny. The father told us he has been waiting over eight months for a permit to work in Israel. He has been unemployed all of this time. When asked why it takes so long, he simply shrugged his shoulders.

When we got to the checkpoint at Qalqilya, our group got off the bus to walk through; I stayed on as I wasn't sure how physically arduous it would be. Aziz warned me that if soldiers boarded the bus, I was not to speak a word of Hebrew, because as an Israeli I was not allowed to be there and I could end up in jail. Again, why am I, an Israeli Jew, not allowed to be at that checkpoint? The answer was, "It's just the way it is."

I spent a lot of time speaking in Hebrew with our bus driver, Aziz's brother. Again I was taken by his warmth and humor – and by the end of the trip I felt we too were friends. He ended by saying he was glad our trip is ending even though he was so glad we came, because tomorrow he could return to his easier job: taking Israeli school children on their tours to various sites in Israel. He said this was the first time he's been in Jenin in twelve years.

In closing, I'd like to say, as an Israeli American, that when one people is being oppressed and occupied by another, there is only one side to the story: that of the oppressed. The violent history between the two peoples does not justify the total oppression of one by the other. The Palestinian people are truly our brothers and we need to do whatever we can to live with them in peace and brotherhood.

I'd like to thank every member of our group for being there to learn with me and to cry with me. As for Brant, I've heard him sometimes jokingly called Martin Luther King. For me this is no joke. I see him as a man among men, and even though we often disagree and argue, I know these later years of my life have been immeasurably enriched by my close relationship with him, and I thank him for pushing me to come on this trip, health issues and all.

As for our tour guides Aziz and Kobi, they are the future of peace, if there will ever be one. I've grown to love them both dearly, and I thank them with all my heart for all that they have taught me, for their wonderful humor, and their loving natures. Their personal stories will be with me always, and I hope they will too.

This entry was posted in [Israel](#), [JRC I/P Study Tour 2010](#), [Palestine](#), [Peace](#). [Bookmark the permalink.](#)



13 RESPONSES TO FROM THE SIDE OF THE OPPRESSED: A GUEST POST FROM PALESTINE**Josh Mark** | [December 30, 2010 at 2:10 pm](#) | [Reply](#)

I am touched my Marge's personal and very human account and the special perspective she offers. Her heartfelt reactions and opinions are so personal, real, and genuine and speak to the tangible opportunity for connection in Israel and Palestine, person to person. Thank-you Marge.

Pauline Coffman | [December 30, 2010 at 2:51 pm](#) | [Reply](#)

All of the posts from Shalom Rov on this trip are very moving for me. It means a great deal to know that some American Jews are willing to go where you are now and listen and learn. Thank you, Marge, for your account. You confirm what I see everytime I go.

Laure Delmas | [December 30, 2010 at 2:52 pm](#) | [Reply](#)

It was so nice to read your story! I have myself made my first trip (Study trip arranged by the Norwegian Peace Association) to the West Bank in October this year. I also had the chance to spend a few days at a Palestinian home in Bethlehem, and got to meet three generations of Palestinians, it was a touching experience. I got also to witness life at the checkpoint 300 in Bethlehem early in the morning when people are queuing to go to work. It was a very painful experience, that really broke my heart. This law that forbids Israelis to travel to the West Bank, where does it come from? How in a democratic country can the citizens be hindered from moving freely around? I wish somebody would explain that to me.

Anyway, thanks again for sharing. I have posted your message on Twitter and Facebook. It has to be read by as many as possible!

I m rosen | [December 30, 2010 at 7:37 pm](#) | [Reply](#)

Thank you Marge for your very moving report of a side of Israel that isn't in the media that most of us are exposed to. I look forward to Brant's blog for a more balanced picture of events in Israel.

laya frischer | [December 30, 2010 at 10:26 pm](#) | [Reply](#)

So glad to hear from you Marge, and to know that this trip was so important and wonderful for you.

Nina Raskin | [December 31, 2010 at 11:12 am](#) | [Reply](#)

Thank you, Marge, for sharing such a life-changing experience. Painful, but so full of your wisdom and capacity to live fully.

Cotton | [December 31, 2010 at 1:43 pm](#) | [Reply](#)

Another thank you, Marge. And an echo of what Pauline said: It means so much that you and your fellow JRCers are willing to travel the West Bank and experience life as a Palestinian. The tragedy is that so few Israelis have (or are allowed) opportunities to know what gentle and loving neighbors they have living right next door.



Shirley Gould | [December 31, 2010 at 4:23 pm](#) | [Reply](#)

I feel as if a part of me has been laid open to new insights. Thank you all.



Maha Jarad | [December 31, 2010 at 10:45 pm](#) | [Reply](#)

I think this is the important work that needs to continue. Seeing things for oneself is powerful and an effective way of educating others about what is happening under Israel's occupation. I hope when you all return, that JRC will organize a public forum where you can provide more report-backs or eye-witness accounts about your trip. Hopefully more people in the Jewish community will be inspired to go.



Ruth Neff | [January 1, 2011 at 12:05 pm](#) | [Reply](#)

Thank you so much for going on this Journey. We are just now trying to get more Americans to travel to Palestine. See our web site Neighborseastandwest.org Our program is planned for June 13-26 -2011.



Lisa Kosowski | [January 1, 2011 at 12:19 pm](#) | [Reply](#)

“... [W]hen one people is being oppressed and occupied by another, there is only one side to the story: that of the oppressed. The violent history between the two peoples does not justify the total oppression of one by the other. The Palestinian people are truly our brothers and we need to do whatever we can to live with them in peace and brotherhood.”



Marge, your essay moved me and I was brought to tears by these concluding words which say it all. Kol hakavod to you for your strength and courage to not only go on this trip (especially considering your health challenges), but to face these emotional challenges and then write so openly and honestly about your impressions.

Ishmail Hummos | [January 2, 2011 at 3:52 pm](#) | [Reply](#)

I was touched with your account. It renews the hope in my heart that most Jews are decent people and what we are currently living is a historical aberration that should stop and be reversed.



I have studied child psychology in Switzerland with the hope of returning back to work with Palestinian and Jewish children traumatized by the war. The State of Israel refused to renew my travel document as an Arab citizen of Jerusalem. Even with an appeal to the Supreme Court I was bluntly told because my mother was not Jewish I have lost my citizenship for



leaving Israel for more than six months. I have silently over the years endured the oppression of my own family, people and humanity by the survivors of worst human tragedy at the hands of, and the silent or active support of so many European Governments.

Try as I may to hate the others, I can't. Most of the wonderful teachers I had were Jewish and most of the wonderful colleagues I have worked with in Chicago are Jewish. So many Palestinians do not have the privilege I had of working with so many wonderful Jews. I am glad regular Israeli Americans are taking the time and courage to get to know and befriend some Palestinians.

I want to dare and ask Rabbi Brant to organize an interfaith dinner, in the American tradition of a Thanksgiving dinner between the families who have undertaken that trip with local Palestinian families. We might be only dreamers who can't change the world, let's pray we can lead our children on the right path to Peace and God.

[Margaret Mayer](#) | January 8, 2011 at 4:52 pm | [Reply](#)



I am not one who cries easily, but Marge's essay gripped me with her honesty and humanity that it led to tears. Thank you Marge for sharing your story. Hopefully many will read this and view the conflict a little differently.

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