



This circle tale comes to us from our dear Art of Hosting colleagues Maria Scordialos and Sarah Whiteley. Maria, a Greek native, and Sarah, an English native, have recently purchased 27 acres of land in Greece and are beginning to create an international learning center there.

In mid-November their work took them to Israel to co-host a gathering of Israelis, Palestinians and Internationals for the purpose of creating a listening container to really hear one another. This is their account: This tale is narrated by Maria and Sarah with the voices of Heather Worosz, Danny Gal, Whit Jones, Paula Jones, Ibrahim Issa, Toke Moeller, and all the wonderful people who attended the Art of Hosting Learning Journey and Circle in Jerusalem on 11 November 2006. Their tale....

Circle Tale, December 2006

The Centre for Emerging Futures in Israel and the West Bank

In 2004, the Centre for Emerging Futures (CEF) initiated a project to offer Israelis, Palestinians, and Internationals the opportunity to hear each other's stories and co-create new futures by being together. As part of that project an "Art of Hosting Meaningful Conversations" was offered in November 2006 to prepare local leaders to host a Global Village Square meeting that would bring together nearly one hundred participants. This tale weaves voices from different email and blog conversations of those who participated.

To understand this story a bit of geographical information is helpful. Israel is a small country (about 2 1/2 times the size of the state of Rhode Island—the smallest U.S. state) in the Middle East bordering the Mediterranean Sea. Jerusalem is located in the middle of Israel adjacent to the West Bank. Gaza is a strip of land on the Mediterranean located within Israel.

In the 3-day Art of Hosting, Palestinians, Israelis and International community leaders came together to learn, practice, and forge a community committed to continue the work of inviting each other into dialogue, story, and action. These practitioners are people like you and I who deeply care about what's happening and wish to create a new story in this region. It was a beautiful 3 days captured well by a quote from Samih, a Palestinian artist from Hebron, "When we speak, I do not see the wall". As a result of the training, a hosting team emerged to call a Global Village Square that would invite more people to join the process. The meeting was set to occur 3 days later.

As is the nature of the region, the picture shifted quickly. An Israeli missile was fired, that missed the target by 500 meters and landed in a residential area of Gaza. Nineteen people lost their lives – many children – with one family completely destroyed where only the father survived. Pictures of him holding his children's shoes and toys as he wandered around in complete shock were shown on the TV. Fear gripped our hearts.

That night – five of us gathered in council over the phone. "Should we cancel the Global Village Square meeting?" Each of us spoke carefully, thoughtfully. We felt torn. On the one hand, this is precisely when we need to continue talking and meeting in our humanity. And on the other hand, the Palestinian Authority had called a three-day period of mourning and there was talk of a general strike. Things were very raw and this always increases the risk of violence. We also considered the question, "How would the Palestinians who attend the meeting be viewed by their own people – as courageous or traitors?" As we talked, clarity emerged – we must respect the period of mourning and postpone the Global Village Square Meeting. We voted our agreement with heavy hearts and deep clarity about our decision. We agreed to connect again over the phone the next morning.

In the morning in another phone call held as a listening council, we decided that although the Global Village Square meeting was not taking place, some of us wanted to gather.

The tale continues with a blog excerpt from Heather (<http://www.heatherworosz.blogspot.com>), a Canadian woman who was living in Israel and part of the community of practitioners. The Danny who is with her is Israeli. She writes: *With the Global Village Square postponed due to a three-day mourning period following the deaths of*



19 innocent villagers in Gaza, we decided to have a small gathering in Jerusalem for those who still wanted to and could get together. Nella, a wonderful Israeli woman and artist, (whose husband had been a victim of fighting in the region), offered her home. What we didn't know was that the Israeli army had closed the borders completely given the threat of retaliation. Even Palestinians with permits were not allowed to cross. We were asked to stop and pick up our West Bank friend, Ibrahim, on the way. (Given the border closure, this was a risky proposition.)

Danny and I walked into the Everest Hotel in Beit Jala (West Bank) where we had met the week before for the Art of Hosting training and where we were meant to have the Global Village Square. There we picked up Ibrahim. We hugged and my tension eased a bit. We started to joke and laugh and my mood lightened a little more.

As we got into the car, I offered Ibrahim the passenger seat. "No, it's better if you sit up front," he laughed. They don't like to see dark faces in the car."

Three guards stood at the checkpoint as we approached. They were young soldiers, eighteen or nineteen years old, two women and one man. They were laughing and seemed to be joking amongst themselves. I felt a bit more positive about our chances of getting through. I turned towards the women guards on my side of the car with a big Canadian smile. They looked and then walked away to continue their conversation. The young man approached Danny on the driver's side and asked a few questions. Danny flashed his former army identification. The soldier said something to Danny and then waved us on. We let out a sigh of relief and started to laugh. We had successfully smuggled Ibrahim across the border. We asked Danny what the soldier had said to him. "Nice rank," he said. "I guess he didn't realize that my card and status are no longer valid."

Fourteen of us gathered in circle – Israelis, Palestinians and Internationals. It felt miraculous that we had Ibrahim from the West Bank and two wonderful men from Gaza – Mohamed and Imad, in the circle. These two men from Gaza had been given Israeli passes and were allowed to come through even though it was a closure day. This happened mainly due to the persistence and love of the young Israeli man mentioned above, Danny.

A question was placed in the centre of the circle, "What has inspired me to come today?" Mohamed picked up the talking piece, a lemon from the fruit bowl. We opened our hearts and listened deeply to the pain that he brought with him of life in Gaza. He spoke of how people had not been paid in over eight months, since Hamas had been elected and most international aid and relations had stopped. He shared how his own son of four is afraid to sleep and asks him to come and hold him – to protect him with his own body against the missiles and sonic boom sounds that go off every night. The piece then went to Eric, an Israeli man who lives in an Israeli village right next to Gaza. He, too, spoke of his children who come to their parents' bedroom because they are afraid to sleep. Heather asked, "What does it mean for the world when children are scared even to sleep?"

Then Ibrahim told the story of being jailed and tortured because of allegations that he was harboring a terrorist. His story was not about fear, anger or pain – his story was about how even whilst being interrogated with his arms tied behind his back so that they ached and his eyes covered so he could not see who was facing him – he still saw this as an opportunity to listen to the other person and to discover what they cared about.

The circle became a safe container where we shared our fears, our tears, our hopes and our dreams. Our words became threads weaving a strong net of connection between us, so that we even harvested a list of potential projects to work on together: Flowers – send flowers from Israeli to Palestinian families to show caring and sympathy; Sister families – establish connection between families from Israel and Palestine; Student exchange – Israeli, Palestinian and international; Joint memorials – build memorials for all who have lost their lives in violence – no matter the political, ethnic, or religious background; Education – teach the children the stories of both sides and not only the local narrative; Kids meet kids – create meetings between children from Gaza and Sederot; Adventure journey – for Israeli and Palestinian youth from Egypt to Italy.

This work continues with conversations to get these projects underway. If you wish to discover more or join our process, either log onto <http://www.cirr.org> or in the USA, contact Whit Jones, wjones@bpahealth.com, in Israel, Danny Gal, dannygal@zahav.net.il, in the West Bank, Ibrahim Issa, Hopeflowers@palnet.com. For more connection to Art of Hosting, go to www.artofhosting.org.



If you have a tale to tell, contact the PeerSpirit office and we'll help you share it.

*For more information on many applications of circle, visit our web site at www.peerspirit.com and subscribe to our monthly Circle Tale newsletter using the subscription mechanism at the top right of the page. Your e-mail address will **not** be shared or used by anyone other than PeerSpirit, and you can unsubscribe yourself at any time.*