

A few years ago I was confronted with some really uncomfortable emotions. My daughter's close friend, from college, whom I adored, and who I'm pretty sure, adored me, stood in the hallway of my home and challenged my core beliefs.

M. is a thirty-something "Palestinian American".

I am a 60-something "American Jew".

(Perhaps it bears validity to look at the semantics of these two titles.)

Both of us passionate, compassionate and involved individuals, we clashed in a discussion about Israel and the situation of the Palestinians in the West Bank.

When M. made reference to brutality done to Palestinian children at the hands of Israeli soldiers I was instantaneously thrown into an emotional turmoil of anger, defense and deep denial that this was even conceivable. I was rendered incapable of thinking or speaking clearly.

M. left my home and for a long time I didn't want her near me, let alone even hear her name mentioned.

My father died in the fall of '05.

I asked Cori to invite her friends, including M. to Shiva.

After a sweet service and songs with our new, embracing synagogue community, M. asked if she could say something.

What she had to say...

This was the first time in her life that she was amongst a group of Jews. She was surprised to learn what warm and loving people we were. She had always seen "us" as violent and hateful.

Fast forward to now, June 2008.

I have been participating in the Dialogue Project for about a year.

I'm not learned in the history of the land, but I was 3 years old when Israeli state hood was declared and I've been in love with it ever since.

The more deeply I'm engaged in Dialogue the more my heart and mind have been in a state of turmoil

It's been emotionally draining to look at my fear and anger and allow my story to be heard openly and honestly by the "other". And - to hear the fear and anger of the "other".

The setting provides safety and support for us all.

The approach allows for listening deeply within ourselves. The process allows gradual unfolding of more and more truth within ourselves and amongst each other.

It's scary, it's provocative, but I am beginning to see how this approach can lead to transformation.

What am I afraid of? What does it mean that Israel is an occupying force? What is our culpability in Gaza? Should we dismantle our settlements in the West Bank? Have Israelis been guilty of brutality? Are these ideas anti-Israel? Anti Semitic?

Maybe not.

All this thought and emotion is like ripping my guts out.

But - there ARE (at least) two sides to every story.

We need to hear each other's truths.

For numbers of years I've possessed great intellectual clarity and concern that the intractable differences, suffering, and anguish between Israelis and Palestinians will never go away by killing and bloodshed. While intellectualizing it was easy to say we

just need to stop looking backwards, start with NOW and move forward. But this is probably the deepest sibling rivalry of all creation and in order to allow for peace we need to rip the multi-generational pain out by its gut wrenching roots. The Dialogue Project provides just such opportunity.

Cari Gardner
June 23, 2008