

Robi Damelin

There is probably no one who can teach us what Robi Damelin can about loving our enemies. Damelin's son David was shot and killed by a sniper guarding a checkpoint during his service in the Israeli army. When she was told of her son's death, her first words were "do not take revenge in the name of my son." She says that now, she is still surprised at her response to David's death. When she was interviewed she insisted that Israel should leave the occupied territories.

Initially Robi wanted to avoid other bereaved families, but she eventually agreed to meet with the organization called The Parents' Circle. The founder of the group, Yitzhak Frankenthal, had seen her interview and called to ask her to attend the group. He had founded the organization after his own son had been kidnapped, tortured and murdered by Hamas in 1994. It brought together families on both sides of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict with the hope of bringing about healing and peace.

Damelin began to work for the Parents' Circle and for the Forgiveness Project. It was through this work that she met Ali Abu Awaad, a former Palestinian revolutionary. He had participated in the first intifada as a teenager and served four years of a ten year sentence in an Israeli prison. Two years before the death of Robi's son, Awaad's brother Yousef was shot and killed by an Israeli soldier. Ali Abu was filled with rage and loss. His own mother's grief led to a chasm that they weren't really able to breach.

Through the Parents' Circle, Ali Abu Awaad met Robi Damelin. Awaad says "But I realized that for me to survive I needed to meet someone on the other side who could understand me--so when I met Robi I met someone who gave me hope." Instead of these losses feeding the hatred and revenge-seeking culture infecting this region, Damelin and Awwad found in each other solace and comfort.

They have travelled the world together for several years, speaking before political, religious and social organizations. Their message is that only reconciliation can bring peace. Ali and Robi feel that it is important to acknowledge the disagreements and problems that exist. But they point out that the firststep to changing is to recognize the suffering of the other. Damelin says "If you are pro-Palestinian or pro-Israel you are not helping us. You are just feeling good about yourself." Robi Damelin was born in South Africa. She was astonished at the changes leading to the end of Apartheid, and believes that if that happened, peace and reconciliation can come to the Israelis and Palestinians.

The friendship between these two has developed into a sweet and loving one. It is one in which at least two people have really come to love their enemy, which of course, make them no longer enemies. She chose to symbolize that relationship by giving to Abu Ali a special jacket that had been David's. They no longer see themselves as an Israeli and a Palestinian, a Muslim and a Jew. They are simply a son and a mother who provide solace and comfort to each other and who look

forward together for a better future. Awaad says that robi has become another mother. He quipped "she knows what kind of clothes I like, people I like, and she advises me on all these things. She even knows what food I like." And Robi responds "Shrimps. He's addicted to shrimps."

For more information: google Parents' Circle (you can see more stories of the group) or Robi Damelin