

WELCOME TO GAZA

The pedagogical emergency help for psycho traumatised children in Gaza has started. A crisis intervention team from the "Friends of Waldorf Education" worked four days among the ruins of Gaza, to support traumatised children with the help of Waldorf pedagogical methods.

Wadi is an 18 month old boy from the Samouni clan with more than 100 members in this extended family of all primarily farmers. With the invasion of the Israeli troops into Gaza city at the end of January the family was commanded to all gather in a nearby house which then came under full fire from a helicopter circling above. 36 family members were fatally wounded many of them women and children. Four days long rescue teams from the red half moon were being hindered from caring for the injured and burying the dead. During this time Wadi was lying next to his dead mother. Since then Wadi has fallen silent, the empty stare in his dark eyes cannot fixate on anything. Shaban 9 years old is another helpless witness. We met these two children on the rubbish dumps of what was previously their home next to a sign which read "Welcome to Gaza".

At the three week military offensive in the Gaza strip at least 1 400 people were killed and about 5 500 injured. More than 22 000 homes were destroyed. Even before this military offensive more than 80% of the population in Gaza lived below the UNO determined poverty line, now they are freezing and starving.

Trauma work – also against terror

More than half of the 1.5 million people in Palestine are under 15 years of age. The suffering in Gaza is hardly to be described. Because of the devastating experiences many of these children are psycho traumatised and need urgent help.

Almesa Clung onto her dead parents four days long desperately trying to keep their bodies clear of vermin as they all lay under the rubble. In a shaky voice she says "when I'm big I will go to the armed forces and kill all those people who killed my family!" If these traumatic experiences of war remains unresolved it nourishes a new generation of terror.

Emergency Pedagogy sets in at the point where a decisive traumatic experience can be processed from the own inner forces or it develops into a form of illness, which could cause the collapse of a biography. The primary focus is a pedagogical therapeutic method based on the principles of the anthroposophical picture of human development.

Nurturing rhythms can help to harmonise the traumatically disturbed rhythms of an organism, approaches with movement therapy or messages helps in relieving cramps or stiffness, artistic therapy provides the possibility to express that which cannot be verbalised, some elements of experiential Pedagogy helps to strengthen self trust and to restore the trust in others.

The suffering of the children

Our pedagogical emergency team works at the Omar Bin Khattab School a UN school in the totally devastated North of Gaza city. Hamsam a 10 year old girl tells how she saw her sister being shot down by soldiers. In a tent of UNICEF the children are doing formdrawing and listens attentively during story time. They are yearning for pictures. On the playground we are playing circle games. In the beginning the children did not want to touch us and now the place at the hand next to the helpers a

hot spot for all children. The hand gives a security. The seven year old Aissa call out: “we always have many foreigners coming here to photograph us, then they leave again, but you come to play!”

To the South of Gaza in the city of Khan Younis at the **Eid Al Agha School** the emergency team is at work. The building is covered with machine gun shots. During our stay in the city the missile bombardment was at a cease fire. Many of the children are absent and inaccessible. Devastating children’s drawings can be seen on the school walls and reveals the pitiless traumatised experiences and the magnitude of inner destruction. A special challenge was the work with deaf traumatised children at the **Atfaluna Society for Deaf Children**. We did Eurythmy and experiential pedagogical practices with many of the children, as well as drawing and wax modelling. The art teacher at the school hasn’t painted since he saw the destruction of the neighbourhood. When he saw the children drawing he grabbed a paint brush and could vent his experience. His cramped up emotions were released. We dedicated many hours at the **Al Qattan Centre** in **Gaza city** many parents brought their children to the centre for artistic therapeutic lesson. The director asked us to take on the training of the teachers.

The suffering of the parents

The emergency pedagogical work in Gaza awoke wide international media interest. Media and radio stations all called for interviews, we were also accompanied by TV – teams from Al Jazeera, Arte and ARD. The leader of the Palestinian ARD television channel asked us if we really thought that emergency Pedagogy could help. Before we could give an answer he broke down in tears showing us the bullet wounds in his tummy: “and who is going to help me get through my trauma?”

The step mother of Abdella sits depressingly on the rummage of what used to be her home. We gave her modelling wax from which she makes a ball and continuously, sobbingly tears it to pieces. After some time she is able to tell how the soldiers killed her one year old daughter. She leads us to the place where it happened and shows us the fallen wall under which her child lay dead and on this wall written in bold English stood “1 gone – 999999 will follow”.

Vandalism of this kind one finds everywhere in Gaza. Furnished homes are purposefully demolished by soldiers, in the cooking pots have been defecated; over the flour supplies have been urinated. Dehumanising writings are found on the walls in Russian, English, Hebrew and French.

A mother who been observing our work with the children suddenly comes and tells us how she tried to sew slit open stomach of her child with needle and thread. Two days later the child died, according to her report, rescue services were not allowed into the area. Suddenly she screams at us, not only the children need you, we women have no clue how to continue!

“What could you achieve?”

After our successful work over four days we received a message from the German consulate in Cairo that we had to leave Gaza immediately. We had just started our emergency pedagogical work with the orphans, and were able at the very last moment to escape across the borders with the help of the German consulate.

Our fleeing departure was filmed by German television. The reporter asked the decisive question during our escape “what could you achieve?”

The emergency Pedagogy crisis intervention is acute aid which could be compared to first aid assistance at the scene of an accident. Although first aid cannot provide immediate cure it can however assist in the healing process of occurred injuries. This applies equally for injuries of soul and Psycho trauma.

Those affected had certainty that others perceived the pain. We have shown the children that not every stranger is a murderer. We have given at least for short moments, the experiences that life can also be beautiful. And everyone knows that hope and joy are true healing factors in life!

At the Omar Bin Khattab School, we received recognition and thanks for our work, from the UN ambassador for children in armed conflict, Mrs Radhika Comaraswamy.

As soon as entrance to Gaza is once again opened for aid organisations we want to continue our interrupted work. We are however only able to do this if enough funds are raised for this purpose.

In our rushed return to the borders the emergency team once again saw the sign "Welcome to Gaza". In this moment we thought of the 21 year old law student who showed us the purposely broken down wall in what used to be his home where upon was written the sentenced. "Don't bother to rebuild your homes. We will come again!"

And we as an emergency team swore: "We too!"

Bernd Ruf