



Butterfly to Flower – Interview with Noga Shavit-Zinger

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Noga Shavit-Zinger, from Kibbutz Dvir in the South, is a volunteer driver and travel coordinator for The Road to Recovery. Noga is married and has an 18-year-old daughter. As a volunteer, she has been driving Palestinian families from crossing points to hospitals and back for the last four years. In her mind, huge swarms of faces flutter around, images of children, men and women who manage to penetrate deep into her consciousness.

"I have often dreamed that our car rides would be filmed during the journey. At the same time, I also dream of an opportunity for discourse amongst volunteers, conversations that would touch the edges of the stories and gather them up. To create a circle. There are so many stories within this solitude.

"I feel that I've undergone a change since I began driving; I am much more empathetic, much more aware and connected to the Palestinian narrative, to the suffering and pain of people living in the prison that is Gaza. Despite the contact and involvement, I regret that I have not succeeded in creating a deeper connection with the Palestinians beyond the car rides. I don't bottle this up, I don't let it get to me, and I resist it . . . but there are the nightmares. Just the thought of parents of a sick child, living all year or more around the disease . . .and then the child dies. I can't grasp it.

"I served in the intelligence service for 23 years and I understand Arabic at a relatively high level for an Israeli, but much less so than native Arabic speakers. I studied law and I was a criminal lawyer for 15 years. I studied psychology and animal therapy. Slowly I fell more in love with animals than with people. I devoted myself to working with the animals at the Beersheba Zoo, where I worked for about seven years. I set up the "PARPARIA", a butterfly sanctuary, a hothouse where people can wander about, among the flowers and butterflies, and then I retired."

I write it all down quickly so that I don't miss any detail of this exiting life story, which is condensed into one short paragraph, and suddenly the idea of the fragile relationship between butterflies and flowers resonates with me.

(Continue)

I make a note to return to the song "The Flower to the Butterfly" by Hayim N. Bialik.

**Use my colors
To sew a coat
Of many dyes
Wings to float**

**You and I
Are flowers both
We shall vow
A friendship oath.**

H. N. Bialik

"I've always waited for the moment when I could volunteer, I fell in love with the idea of "a little help". When I started driving, I met Yael Noy who was the Erez crossing coordinator and she soon became a significant figure for me, a professional authority, attentive and always ready to listen to my stories. She knew how to be there for me. Now I realize that this was a special encounter that not every volunteer experiences. I am wary of social connections and prefer relationships of a non-committal sort – maybe for fear of causing or being hurt. I remember things I did that hurt others, and I cannot forgive myself..."

(A wave of questions fills my mind ... What happened? Who did you offend? And why can't she forgive?... I feel it's not a suitable moment to enquire, maybe I'll leave it to the imagination...).

"And despite this, there are also exciting experiences that leave their mark. People who are seared into my memory. A passenger of mine, a woman my age, strong, independent, unmarried and childless, completely immersed in her career who preferred to talk to me about the best experiences of her life rather than about her illness. It's extremely difficult to decipher the code of Palestinian society. The social structure is different, and the differences are enormous. I found a strong and heroic woman, someone just like me prior to my marriage. I really identified with her story.

"In another case, I drove an unaccompanied woman, about 50 years old, from Gaza to the Damascus Gate where she took a bus to Ramallah, where she was being treated. During the ride, we grew close, and she asked why I volunteer. I told her I feel that it's my duty. I pledged to do something small to remedy things. She was moved by this, and she held my hand and we both cried.

"At the same time, I'm aware of the lack of balance in this relationship. Starting a relationship with a person who's in a state of dependency seems wrong. I prefer momentary intimacy with boundaries. Interpersonal relationships under laboratory conditions don't threaten me.

"I like to do good. And when I know I've done good, the reward is instantaneous. Sometimes I leave the house a little gloomy and when I get back from a driving mission, I am full of joy. As a transportation coordinator, I miss this experience and so I drive three times a week and the satisfaction is huge and instantaneous."