



# UK Friends of the Bereaved Families Forum (FBFF)

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## Two parallel stories - exploring history with Israeli and Palestinian grannies

I recently returned from Israel/Palestine, where I participated in the last session of the Narrative Project run by the Women's Group within the Bereaved Families Forum. 16 Palestinian and 16 Israeli grandmothers took part. The grandmothers' group was created in recognition that they are the carriers of their families' histories over a number of generations and have a unique position of influence within their families.



The grannies spent four days together, learning about each other's personal histories through telling their stories; they had discussions with Palestinian and Israeli historians about the two parallel collective narratives, each with its own perspective. Together they visited the Holocaust Museum in Jerusalem and a Palestinian village abandoned in 1948 – Ein Karem. The family of one of the Palestinian participants came from the village and this was the first time she had been able to visit the place. For many in the group this was the first encounter with the pain and trauma of the other side of the conflict.

After learning about the history of Ein Karem, we travelled to Beit Jala, where we exchanged photographs of our grandchildren and painted together, in small mixed groups, a home for them, expressing the joint aspirations for a safe and peaceful place where creativity and the love of life can be nurtured.

Nasra trusted into my hands a photo of Hamad, her grandson. I will be thinking about him and his life as I look into his brown eyes. There was much laughing and singing, as well as shared tears.

At the closing event, all the participants talked about the strong bonds and friendships forged in such a short time, and the new understanding of and empathy for the other side. The two groups of women, who, for security reasons, are barred from meeting without special permits, were moved by each other. They want to keep meeting.

**Chani Smith**  
Hon Secretary, FBFF

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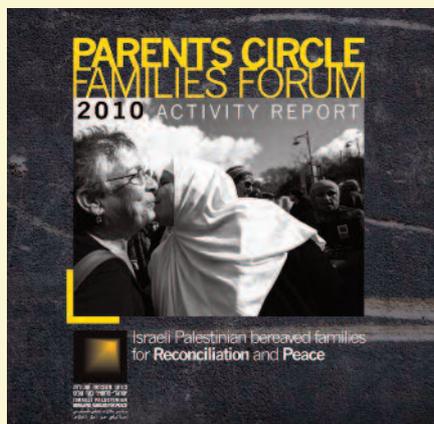
## Social media opening a new Crack in the Wall

A report on the activities of the Parents Circle-Bereaved Families Forum during 2010 can be downloaded from our website:

[www.familiesforum.co.uk](http://www.familiesforum.co.uk)

Among the many projects it covers is 'Crack in the Wall', an innovative social media project which allows Israelis and Palestinians to engage, to express their views, tell their stories, talk and get to know one another virtually – and maybe eventually in person.

The project was born out of the success of the PCFF's Hello-Shalom Project – a free phone line connecting Israelis and Palestinians.



The boom in technological innovation and new media has created an exponential growth in opportunities for individuals to engage with each other. The project is therefore being extended to include SMS text messaging, Facebook, Twitter and an interactive community website. Palestinians and Israelis, and indeed the whole world, will be able to cross hitherto forbidden borders.

This project has been made possible by the generosity of the European Union.

## British Masorti rabbi tells Arab-Jewish group of a symbolic trek through Germany

In October, Rabbi Jonathan Wittenberg, the head of the British Masorti community, walked from Frankfurt to London. The idea behind his 20-day trek was to symbolically carry the *ner tamid*, the eternal flame, of the West End synagogue – where his grandfather Georg Salzberger served as rabbi until Kristallnacht in 1938 – to the New North London Synagogue, his new *shul* in Finchley.

During a short visit to Israel, he spoke not to Jews of German origin or expatriates from Britain about his 400-km journey but to a small group of local Jews and Arabs who have lost loved ones in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict – the Parents Circle-Families Forum.

'The inside was destroyed, but the eternal light was still burning,' said Wittenberg, quoting from his grandfather's memoirs. 'I thought about this light, this light that burned through darkness. The idea of light that keeps burning even when things are dark is very important. As a rabbi I see this, for example, when I visit people who are very ill and they still manage to have dignity or courage or love for their family. But I also see it in the work of the Forum. Despite the intense pain – that's far too familiar to many people here now – the light of

hope for understanding and making contact is still there.'

In front of a mixed Israeli and Palestinian audience in the West Bank town of Beit Jala, Wittenberg described the different places he saw and people he met during his 20-day march. 'The walk is also about relationships between people,' the soft-spoken Wittenberg said.

'It asks the question what a good, tolerant society is, and what it is not. That is a relevant question both for Israelis and for Palestinians, internally and certainly between the two.'

Wittenberg has been a supporter of the Parents Circle since it was created more than ten years ago. He recalled the phrase that resonated with him the first time the co-founders met in his London home:

'Try not just to be on the Israeli side. Try not just to be on the Palestinian side. Please be on the human side. Because that is what we all are.'

◆ *This is a slightly edited version of a report by Raphael Ahren in Ha'aretz. The full report can be found at [www.haaretz.com/weekend/anglo-file/ray-of-eternal-light-1.341146](http://www.haaretz.com/weekend/anglo-file/ray-of-eternal-light-1.341146)*

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### UK Friends of the Bereaved Families Forum (FBFF)

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