

Mount Zion Award for Keren and Rami

In January 2003 Helga Dieter took part in an excursion to Israel and Palestine organized by the German Peace Movement. By chance she met Prior Benedikt from the monastery on the Mount Zion in Jerusalem.

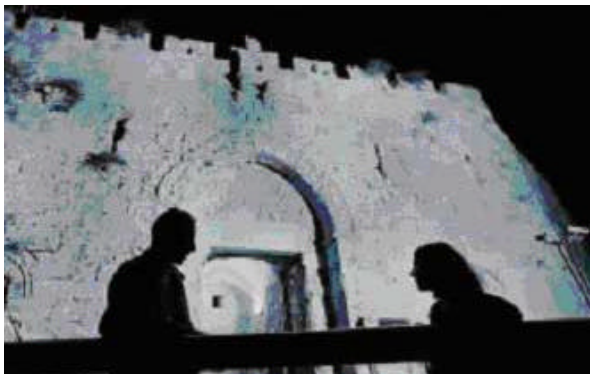


She told him the story of Keren from Tel Aviv and Rami from East Jerusalem, who had encountered each other in 2001 on the “Peace Boat” of the Japanese peace movement, where they had both been lecturers. To their amazement both realized there, far from the actual conflict, how much their ideas about a peace making process coincided.

At that time, at the height of the 2nd Intifada, for the project “Vacation from War” the search for partner organizations in Israel and Palestine for the planned encounters proved to be difficult. Finally Helga got to know Keren and Rami. Since summer 2002 they have organized groups of friends from both sides that with enthusiasm came to the seminars in Germany. They founded the initiative “Breaking Barriers” at the first holiday camp hosted by the “Vacation from War” Campaign.

Helga Dieter recommended Keren and Rami successfully for the noted “Mount-Zion-Peace-Award”. In autumn 2003 they were honoured by Prior Benedikt, head of the Benedictine Cloister of Mount Zion in Jerusalem, he said then in his laudation:

“They have the courage, honesty, strength and spirit to continue their efforts in a time in which such projects are needed probably more than ever before. The political struggle between two national movements is in its most crucial, dangerous and violent phase. The future is either a time of communication and cooperation or the region will fall into more blood and violence – should that be possible.”



Keren und Rami in front of Zions Gate, Jerusalem
(Foto Frieder Bickle)

Laudatory Speech, Mount Zion Award 2003, October 28, 2003

Dr. Matthias Ries, Coordinator, "Center for Encounters and Communication – Honoring the Heritage of Willy Brandt"

Dear Abbot Benedikt, Your Excellencies, Distinguished Laureates, Ladies and Gentlemen,
Willy Brandt said: "Peace is not everything, but without peace everything is nothing." In fact, peace is more than the absence of war, although many nations would be thankful for that alone today. A sustainable peace system requires equal development opportunities for all nations. Peace is a permanent task. We need peace not only in the sense of the absence of violence; we need it as the basis for meaningful and sustainable cooperation. Peace, like freedom, is no original state of mind; we shall have to create it, in the truest sense of the word.

I, as a German citizen within Europe, am observing the situation in the Middle East with grave concern. Since Europe is not only geographically close to the conflict, this concern urges Europe to continue working for peace with great determination. No national interest can today be isolated from collective responsibility for peace, all over the globe.

It is not enough to pronounce peace-loving intentions but we must also endeavor actively and support to organize peace. The principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of other nations must be respected, but non-interference is also not helpful. For Europe, it appears that our powerlessness in the face of increasingly escalating violence of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict demonstrates that we are not doing enough.

However, how to prevent war is a question which is part of the European tradition - Europe has always had reason to ask it. Under the threat of human kind's self-destruction, cooperation has become a question of the very existence of life. Cooperation and co-existence became not one of several acceptable possibilities but the only chance of survival.

This year, the jury decided to give the Mount Zion Award in equal measure to the Israeli Keren Assaf, and the Palestinian Rami Naser Eddin. In their various ways, each of these young activists are dealing impressively with their vision of peace.

This year's award honors a young Israeli and a young Palestinian, who know how difficult it is to make cooperation in an atmosphere of hatred and violence. Keren and Rami are not only building the bridge, they are symbolizing the bridge which the two parties in this conflict can and must cross in order to coexist – in spite of all terrible setbacks and huge frustrations.

I extend my warmest congratulations to the laureates who have persistently reiterated their message of mutual respect and recognition in the midst of all the violence. The escalation calls for a great deal of strength and courage to bridge the deep abyss between both societies, especially between the youth.

Ladies and Gentlemen, dear Guests, by participating in this ceremony today you demonstrate not only your interest in the Mount Zion Award and the personalities and visions of the laureates, but you express your solidarity for these two young outstanding activists.

Keren Assaf was born in West-Jerusalem in 1980. After finishing high school in Tel Aviv, she refused the Israeli army service because of conscience reasons; instead, she did her civil service and participated in the youth movement of "Peace Now". From 1999 until 2000 Keren was the national coordinator of "Peace Now" youth. In 2000 she became the cofounder of the Israeli youth movement "New Profile", and took an active part in youth projects of the "Israeli Committee against House Demolition".

Rami Naser Eddin was born in East-Jerusalem in 1977. During his time at the college to become an engineer, he volunteered as the director of the "Red Crescent Youth Center". Between 1997 and 2002 he offered his skills as a trainer to the Palestinian Ministry of Youth and Sport, and to

the Palestinian NGO "Panorama". Since 2000 he is the executive director of the Palestinian Youth Association "Palestine Vision".

Keren and Rami have met for the first time in May 2001 on the Japanese Peace Boat, cruising the Mediterranean and attending training courses in conflict transformation. Since then, both have organized many joint Palestinian-Israeli youth activities as workshops, seminars, and training course, not only here – in Israel and Palestine, especially in this wonderful monastery - but also in Germany, organized by the Committee for Basic Rights and Democracy.

Dear Keren and dear Rami, you are courageous! Your active concept of cooperation is based neither on fear nor on blind confidence. It means transforming the conflict; it means doing away with actual or supposed barriers with peaceful risks. It means building up confidence through courageous visions, shared responsibilities, breaking taboos and practical arrangements.

We see that you are representing a minority in Israel and Palestine at present. But your commitment in such a difficult situation, dear Keren and dear Rami, inspires hope in a peaceful way out of the conflict.

Your friendship and your trustful cooperation stand for the conviction that real peace is possible by facing the different truths together.

There are several truths, not merely the one truth which excludes all others. You believe in diversity and hence in doubt. It is productive. It questions existing things. It can be strong enough to smash injustice. It is tough enough to outlast defeats and to disillusion victors.

In a time of escalation, against the mainstreams, you are already making, and even more, you are in fact living peace. You are promoting human dignity. Your vision serves every individual in his and her efforts to live and develop his and her life meaningfully.

What you need, dear Keren and dear Rami, is a sense of proportion, resolution and, most important, endurance. And of course, you also need to have an eye for new dimensions and the energy to cope with them. In view of the magnitude of the tasks facing you, you require a healthy mixture of faith in the future and sober realism.

Incidentally, can there be anything more important than helping to organize peace?

You deserve our recognition, our respect, our admiration and our active support in order for your dream of peace in Israel and Palestine to come true.

Thus, we want to express our support to you, Keren and Rami, to your courageous vision of cooperation, freedom, justice and equality.

This comes from the bottom of my heart: May all those who possess the power to decide for war and peace bow to you.

But before I come to an end, I would like to share with you the congratulations send by your friend Rainer Zimmer-Winkel from Berlin:

Dear Keren, dear Rami, dear Friends,

at the very special place of the Mount of Zion
in the very special City of Jerusalem/Al Kuds/Yerushalyim
in this very special days of the political struggle of two nation for this very special land
two special people are honoured this evening.

An award is always a sign of respect for those, who are being awarded.

But this time the price is in the same moment an award for those who present it.

I would like to pay my respect and my gratitude to the Mount Zion Foundation and its committee for the courageous step of giving this years price to two young people, who does not have an old record of being peace activists or veteran "fighters" for understanding.

But those two young people are a sign of something which seems even more important: They have the courage, the honesty, the power and the spirit to continue their efforts in a time, which needs such efforts maybe more than all the time before: The political fight between two national movements is in it's most critical, most dangerous and most violent period. The coming time is either are period of understanding and of co-operation – or the whole area will lost into more blood and even more violence - if possible.

May this price show how much people still support a co-operative vision, a constructive attitude, a clear and open directive towards a situation, where two people and three religions will really share the Holy City and the Holiness of the City of Jerusalem.

Thank you very much, Keren, thank you very much, Rami, for what you are doing together and let us join you.

Thank you



Helga and Abt Benedikt



Keren and Rami receive the Mount-Zion-Award from Abt Benedikt in Jerusalem