

THE JERUSALEM POST

MAGAZINE

December 11, 2009



We wish you a happy holiday with our enlightening Hanukkah pieces and recipes throughout this festive edition

Ilana, the Jewish Beduin

This British-born environmentalist gave up everything to live a nomadic life. Why? -16-



Robin Garbose's new flick, 'A Light for Greytowers' -28-



A Jewish graveyard for 'Titanic' victims in Nova Scotia -36-



The Jewish Beduin



ILANA MEALLEM with a Beduin elder. 'When I went to see my family for Shabbat, it was like going from the Sudan to Switzerland.'

Living with Beduin and uncovering a looming public health disaster started British-born Ilana Meallem on a journey as a Jewish emissary into the Muslim world

• LAUREN GELFOND FELDINGER

She could never have expected to drop her crusade for marine biology to live among the Beduin in Israel. Growing up Orthodox and Zionist, she could never have imagined any of the Middle East desert adventures that were to follow.

Ilana Meallem, 32, grew up in London underneath an Israeli flag tacked to the wall over her bed. Her Egyptian father of Iraqi descent filled her childhood with stories about fleeing repression in Egypt, and adventure tales of Israel's pre-state underground forces working against the British. On public buses, she watched as her non-Jewish peers taunted her siblings in their Jewish day school uniforms. England was for her just a random country housing her family until she could grow up and escape to her spiritual homeland in Israel.

After volunteering for two years in the IAF as a reconnaissance photographer, and then studying biology and environmental studies at Hebrew University, she spent most of her early 20s traveling. She started in Cairo to find the cousins she had never met. In South America and Asia, she volunteered in disadvantaged communities and interned at conservation societies for dolphins, whales, turtles, coral reefs and nature reserves. Later, when she signed on

for graduate studies at the Arava Institute of Environmental Studies and Ben-Gurion University's desert studies program, she came armed with a proposal dedicated to dolphin welfare.

But the people she met there, combined with a sustainable-development field trip to unrecognized Beduin villages in the Negev, made her realize that she didn't need to look for people and projects to help all over the world when there was so much to be done at home and in the region.

Are you a Beduin?

My friends call me a techo-beduin, because I'm hooked up to wireless Internet through a cellphone modem. But I have been nomadic for the past 12 years, and in the last six it has been extreme, moving all over the Middle East and the world with my laptop and drum. In the last two years my lifestyle took a major upgrade, and now, when in Israel, I use a camper, not as a car but as my home, parked alone in forests, deserts, by riverbanks, beaches, in friends' backyards and in Beduin villages.

The van has a kitchen and bed, but I don't sleep in the van unless it's raining. Sleeping under the stars and waking up with the sun helps me feel grounded, connected, inspired and rejuvenated. I love to light a fire at dawn and await the new day. I make bread on

a Beduin *saji* [a metal plate over a fire] and I shower in nature at any water source, or simply from a two-liter water bottle with holes in the lid. I live as close to nature and people as possible with minimal impact on the environment and maximum freedom.

What was the first thing that happened in your travels that influenced your lifestyle?

Through a cetacean training at the Phuket Marine Biology Research Center in Thailand, I joined a one-month river dolphin survey in Bangladesh's Sunderbans, the largest mango forest in the world, famous for its man-eating Bengal tigers. I was the only Jewish person with 29 Muslims, one Christian and a Hindu.

On the boat, I frequently hung out below deck, talking, singing and playing my drum with the crew. These workers – fisherman, guards, cooks, the captain – were blown away. Even the Bangladeshi researchers rarely came below deck – workers and researchers are always segregated. Soon all of us were having cultural nights on deck, dancing, singing and praying together in Bengali, Arabic and Hebrew. I was the first Jew any of them had met and they started to call me "the healer."

I always loved being in nature, but this was the beginning of my journey in trust and faith, and seeing myself on a mission to bring a positive Jewish example into the Muslim world.



What was one of the most unexpected things that happened in your travels?

I was staying in Dacca, the capital of Bangladesh, with the family of a friend from the survey. They were in love with the movie *Fiddler on the Roof*—they grew up with it and knew all the songs. I would never have dreamed that I would arrive in this far away place, surrounded by a population of some 12 million Muslims, and that they would be watching this and that I would be watching with them, singing with them and explaining things, like what is a kippa and what all the customs are. They were so excited to meet a Jew.

Why did you leave all your adventures to go to graduate school?

I came back to Jerusalem for my sister's wedding and, by chance, heard about the Arava Institute for Environmental Studies, an interdisciplinary program training Palestinians, Israelis, Jordanians and internationals as the region's next environmental leaders. I realized that to solve environmental problems it is not enough to know science — you also have to fund-raise, understand cultural, political, social and gender aspects and how to establish or work with NGOs. It became clear I needed more training. I wrote my application while volunteering in a shanty town in Chile.

A few months later I was working in the Pantanal Nature Reserve in Brazil, leading safaris on horseback, swimming with piranhas and anacondas, helping set up an ecological center and training hunters as guides. I had to travel one hour to a phone for my interview.

Once accepted to study, you intended to focus on the Israeli bottlenose dolphin population. What happened?

We had a field trip to Wad el-Nam, an unrecognized Beduin village in the Negev, next to the Ramat Hovav toxic waste treatment facility. These people were living without electricity, in tin shacks under huge high-voltage lines from the power station, and were getting sick from the pollution. And I was touched by these tribal women. I had seen the makeshift villages surrounded by garbage, but never thought about why they live like this.

This began a journey to understand

how government policies forcing these once proud, healthy and vibrant seminomadic people off their traditional range lands to relocate and urbanize, left them without traditional livelihoods, with scarce possibilities and with huge public health problems. I was struck — I had been all over the world volunteering and right under my nose in a place I love so much was something so unjust and volatile.

Wasn't this also the first time you met Palestinians?

I never had a deep connection with a Palestinian. Like many Israelis, I was afraid of them and believed they wanted to throw all us Jews into the sea. At the Arava Institute, it was my first time to hear personal stories of hardship faced by Palestinians and Jordanians and Arabs living in Israel. I trusted these accounts — they were not from books or newspapers but were

personal histories from real people who had become my friends. Their stories opened my eyes to understand better the complexities of the region.

How did you come to live with the Beduin?

The more I learned, the more I couldn't believe what was happening there and the more I realized that Israelis don't know. So I told my adviser that even though I have no background in anthropology, sociology or Arabic, I have to live with the Beduin to understand. He connected me to an expert on Negev and Sinai Beduin, who introduced me to a Beduin family. I was also able to get several scholarships to research environmental health in Beduin communities.

What are your first memories about the Negev Beduin village of Umm Batin?

I first went to meet them during Ramadan. A respected sheikh in the village took me to a very bare tin home with asbestos ceilings. Everything was broken and poor. One of his wives spoke some English and we had an amazing conversation about her premarital life in a nearby Beduin township, before moving to live in the harsh conditions of this unrecognized village. We ate rice and I picked out the meat.

A few months later, I came back, this time to stay for a few months and conduct my study. My first day I hung out with the women and kids, drumming and dancing to songs on their transistor radio. The father has three wives, 15 kids and 13 grandchildren. He said: "You are like my daughter now; welcome to my home. You have my protection. Don't walk alone outside after dark, but know that you are safe." They were so warm to me.

'My first day I hung out with the women and kids, drumming and dancing to songs on their transistor radio. The father has three wives, 15 kids and 13 grandchildren. He said: "You are like my daughter now; welcome to my home. You have my protection. Don't walk alone outside after dark, but know that you are safe"'



WITH HER peace van. 'I have faith in the human spirit and the power of love. Hatred is learned, so it can be unlearned.' (Ariel Jerozolimski)

INTERVIEW



PREPARING TEA. 'Through my camper and my nomadic life, I try to create a sacred space that welcomes everyone.'
(Ariel Jerolimski)

I slept outside under a mosquito net on uncovered mats with the kids and the wife who was not having her alternating night with the sheikh. Lying under the stars, I would tell them about my world and straight away became a member of the family. I never once felt in danger, especially since I put on the head scarf. They were really touched by that. The most dangerous thing in a Beduin village is the dogs. I carried stones in my pocket. When I went to see my family for Shabbat, it was like going from the Sudan to Switzerland.

What did you do all day?

I conducted a pioneering field research into the public and environmental health impacts of waste disposal practices related to Israeli government policies of denying or providing inadequate basic municipal services to the Negev Beduin population. I observed and led interviews to learn about how their way of life changed, what do they buy, what do they use, what do they throw away and where.

After three months, I lived with another family and recruited a research assistant from the village. Using his non-roadworthy car, which we turned on with a knife, we drove all over Beduin areas, even in Tel Sheva, where even the police don't go. In these areas, it's the wild west. My identity made it easier to build trust – being from England with a Jewish Egyptian father and that I was learning Arabic. As a foreign woman, I also had access to the men's and the women's worlds.

What did your research find?

Despite having official documents of land ownership from the Ottoman Empire, the villagers of Umm Batin fought for recognition by Israel for decades, suffering from home demolitions and the spraying of herbicides on their crops until 2005, when they won the legal battle. Traditionally, lifestyles revolved around raising livestock and practicing rain-fed agriculture, and all the organic waste was put to use as food for livestock, fertilizer for land or energy sources for heating and cooking. Old clothes were reused as rags for sanitation or as patches for clothes and tents. Hides from slaughtered animals, wool and hair were used as stuffing for mattresses or pillows, to weave tents, make bags or decorations.

But in the past 25 to 30 years, government policies and the villagers' increased contact with modern lifestyles and Western consumer culture resulted in a shift from the traditional "waste free" lifestyles. Today consumption levels are much higher and the kinds and amounts of waste being produced and needing disposal include tin, aluminum, plastic, glass, metal, concrete and diapers. Yet without access to municipal waste disposal services, the villagers are literally being buried under their own waste. Burning of waste in the backyards is the most common disposal method. This is a serious health concern: New types of waste contain mate-

rials that, when burned, are explosive or produce toxic chemicals, such as dioxins and furans.

Add to this pollution, people placing contaminated wood and used plastic bags on the fire used for heating, cooking, washing, making tea and baking Beduin pita. All these pollutants can make people very sick – migraines, birth deformities, cancer and respiratory problems. For this reason, burning waste is illegal in Israel. For cultural reasons, women especially deal with the waste and are enclosed at home more, so they and their children are most at risk. There is minimal awareness of these hazards and safer options are often unavailable for economic reasons. The Hebron wadi, which runs for four

'My research showed that the environmental and public health impact of the lacking municipal services in this community also potentially endangers neighboring Jewish communities. So this is really a transboundary environmental and public health issue that should be of a concern to all'

kilometers through the heart of the village, was also polluted with hazardous chromium, and sheep and goats grazed on vegetation contaminated by this untreated sewage, meaning the meat can be toxic. There was also a huge stench that is horrific from the sewage and piles of rubbish, animal waste and on occasions, dead animal carcasses.

Is paying municipal taxes a factor in getting municipal services, like garbage removal?

In general, yes. But in the case of unrecognized villages, you cannot pay taxes if the settlement is not recognized. But even the seven legal Beduin townships get less funding from the national government compared to Jewish towns and, with their extremely high population density, less land is available to safely distance waste dumping from the homes. This encourages the use of informal and hazardous alternatives, like in some cases, garbage and animal waste burning seen in the middle of town.

Further worsening the situation is general poverty and absence of any real economic activity in the Beduin settlements, meaning municipalities collect extremely low levels of taxes. Since government grants supposed to compensate for this deficiency fall short, the level of municipal services is well below acceptable levels.

But this is a very complex issue with many political, economic and cultural power dynamics. Regardless, my research showed that the environmen-



IN TEL SHEVA. 'The kids don't get a lot of affection but they know from me they will get a lot of hugs and love.'

tal and public health impact of the lacking municipal services in this community also potentially endangers neighboring Jewish communities. So this is really a transboundary environmental and public health issue that should be of concern to all.

The restriction on grazing in the village and the desire to keep raising livestock means that manure and soiled straw from animal pens piles up next to homes, attracting rats that bite children, flea infestation and waste that is so bothersome that residents often burn it and the fires sometimes smolder for weeks, creating choking smoke and hidden coals that children often stumble onto, burning hands and feet. In addition, the absence of electricity means diesel generators are prevalent, but very costly, so are operated only for a few hours, meaning refrigerators do not keep food fresh during off hours. Gas is prevalent for cooking and heating but also a big expense for this impoverished society, so there are cases of Beduin children dying of pneumonia in harsh winters.

What solutions have you proposed?

This whole issue of energy and waste is a big problem, but one solution is to turn this waste into a resource and use the human and animal manure to create biogas to fuel lights, cook on, run refrigerators, heaters and as a fertilizer by-product. I approached the Arava Institute, which helped me and Arab alumnus Mazen Zoabi to work together to develop a Beduin biogas project, in cooperation with many academic institutions and NGOs. We are developing an integrated biogas system adapted to arid lands. At a training course in China we met a Jordanian biogas researcher and have since developed a project for small-scale biogas digesters in Beduin communi-

ties in Jordan and Israel. We are now building our first pilot. It's an amazing solution that came out of my research.

Was your level of freedom difficult for the Beduin?

This is a big conflict in my life: For any woman, the way I live in my camper and traveling the world and sleeping outside is on the extreme side of free. I meet so many people who are more restricted than me. Some of my Beduin sisters have zero freedom. For most of them it's just a dream to travel, and I worry if it is fair that I'm sharing stories of my journeys. But I know each person has her path. I was born with a certain level of freedom and feel it is my obligation to maximize this, to live life to its fullest, because I can and so many people cannot.

Sometimes it has a certain level of influence. Three young Beduin girls in the family I lived with are now doing a year of community service in Beduin towns and villages. One will study environmental science and my research assistant even traveled to Turkey and Brazil. When in the village, I often find myself helping to prepare Beduin women for their wedding night – we have amazing late-night conversations about the feminine aspects of life. I gave one woman her first massage, she was crying out of gratitude. It is insane. How many times have I received a massage in my life?

Were there cultural difficulties for you?

Some women cannot go to the health clinic without being escorted by men, but some women go on to study medicine, so the independence of women really varies within Beduin society. Verbal and physical fighting seems common and there is a lot of tension between the wives. I saw a lot of difficult

things, but was careful to keep a neutral position. I try to be true to who I am and how I act affects them. For example, the kids don't get a lot of affection but they know from me they will get a lot of hugs and love. I am myself and people see that and take what they want.

How did living with the Beduin influence you?

I learned a lot of Arabic there and it helped me to make friends and appreciate Arabic culture, something I was afraid of before. I have since visited Jordan 25 times and Egypt 10 times, and other places around the region, and Arabic is the key to connecting and feeling comfortable. Before if I sat at a bus stop and someone was speaking Arabic, I got nervous. I didn't know what they were saying, and now I can turn and speak to them. I also learned Arabic dance from the many weddings and to make bread on a sajj – very useful when you live outdoors.

Most of all, I learned about hospitality. Beduin are the ultimate hosts and as a Jew I learned that this was the trait of the patriarch Abraham/Ibrahim, the father of Isaac and Ishmael, the ancestor of all Jews, Christians and Muslims, that his tent would be open from all sides, welcoming all who came.

Through my camper and my nomadic life, I also try to create a sacred space that welcomes everyone. Last winter I hosted hundreds of people from all over Israel and the West Bank at the Dead Sea. I am sure I was able to create this welcoming space because of my years knowing the Beduin and learning to love part of the Arab culture and embodying this very positive aspect of their tradition.

You often sleep alone in the wilderness. Don't you get scared?

I love to feel a trust in the universe and in the creator. Lying under the stars, before I sleep, I always say the Jewish prayer, "afkid ruchi b'yadecha" – I place my spirit in your hands – and I mean it with all my heart.

When you travel alone in the Middle East alone, have you been threatened?

In Jordan, after meeting with King Abdullah to talk about Israeli youth, I went with a group of delegates to hear live oud music. As I was dancing, a 60-year-old man asked me where I was from. I said, "I am your neighbor." He said, "What? From Israel?" and he put his hands around my throat. I said, "It's okay; I love you" – it just came out. I even surprised myself with this automatic response. I knew it wasn't me he wanted to choke but all the stories and his suffering that at that moment I represented. I looked into his eyes and said it again and he let go and walked away. I couldn't believe it. Later he came back and started to talk to me. He told me he was a Palestinian refugee and I told him who I am, what I do, and we talked for a while. It was a powerful experience.

Things are not always what you expect. My Beduin family has half their family in Jordan and once when I went with their tribe to visit, I got off the bus in Amman and took a taxi. The driver saw that I had Hebrew written in my

'Most of all, I learned about hospitality. Beduin are the ultimate hosts and as a Jew I learned that this was the trait of the patriarch Abraham/Ibrahim, the father of Isaac and Ishmael, the ancestor of all Jews, Christians and Muslims, that his tent would be open from all sides welcoming all who came'



PROMOTING PEACE. 'We use tools from many traditions, from yoga to talking workshops and studying the earth-based wisdoms of the American Indians.'

notebook and told me he was from the West Bank and had worked with Jews selling fruits and vegetables in Lod, before travel was restricted. He loved Hebrew so insisted on driving me for one hour to my destination instead of dropping me at the bus stop, so that we could talk in Hebrew. He also put in a tape of [Israeli singer] Zehava Ben. The next week he hosted me in his house in Amman to meet his family.

There is so much desire for connection if you meet people and are not fearful. Whenever I travel the Middle East, I have always told the truth about my roots, born in England to a Jewish family with a father from Egypt and now based in Jerusalem. But for a nomad like me, who has spent time in nearly 50 countries in the last 12 years, where I am from is a complicated question.

Recently I have started responding with a quote from the Koran, "*Min blaad Allah el awasa*"—I am from the magnificent country of God, which is the same source for all people, and always in the Middle East, people respond to this with, "*waana kaman*," — and me too.

This always leads to a wonderful conversation about good and bad people in all religions and countries.

What have you been doing recently?

Since completing my research in 2006, which received two awards, I have been working at the Arava Institute on the Beduin biogas project and, with other alumni, on projects to encourage the network of graduates from all over the region to stay connected and involved in joint environmental projects in Israel, Palestine and Jordan.

Most recently, I also initiated several workshops in Jordan, Egypt, Turkey, Palestine and Israel that teach a holistic approach to activism. So many young peace and environmental activists from this region are burned out, exhausted and even depressed, so we encourage them to work together on overcoming personal and community obstacles, and to build personal, community and environmental sustainability, which we consider to be peace-building. We use tools from many traditions, from yoga to talking workshops and studying the earth-based wisdoms of the American Indians.

Such tools are especially hard for activists from the Arab and Muslim countries to access, and doing it together with Israelis is very complex and challenging but ultimately very powerful. At the events held in Jordan, Turkey and Egypt, we have had young peace activists participate from countries including Iran, Iraq, UAE, Egypt and Afghanistan, together with Israelis.

I am also a core member of the Musaique Project, with musicians from around the Middle East, who meet to play, sing, perform and record together.

Don't you meet people in the Middle East who don't want to affiliate with an Israeli Jew?

At a UN energy training course in Amman, I was the only Jewish Israeli with six Palestinian and Jordanian Arava Institute graduates and 60 people from the Middle East, including Saudis, Kuwaitis, Syrians, Lebanese, Yemenis and Iraqis. Many participants were upset that an Israeli was there and determined to avoid contact with me. The next day I decided to sit next to a woman from Lebanon and immediately asked her about how her family was affected by the last war with Israel, saying that I was sorry for her suffering. I think this really shocked her and slowly she opened up and we connected.

On the third day we were supposed to watch Al Gore's film on the environment, and by mistake or serendipity, someone put on *Encounter Point*, a film made by the Bereaved Parents Forum, showing Palestinian and Israeli families who lost relatives in the fighting and were working together for reconciliation and change in their own societies. Nobody from any of these represented Arab countries would likely have seen such a program and they were taken by surprise.

Twenty minutes later, when the organizers came to check on us and saw the wrong film playing, they tried to switch it, but nobody wanted them to. Person after person came up to me afterward in tears and told me that after this film they were able to better understand where I might be coming from and that it was so powerful to meet their first Jew or Israeli. I developed deep and real relationships with many participants and presented my work on the Beduin and this was also a credential for me, that as a Jewish Israeli I went to live with and cared about Palestinian Beduin. The mutual love and respect between myself and the Arab Arava graduates also did wonders and gave a powerful message.

With a young delegation at the Fourth Petra Peace Conference last year, most of the Arabs from Palestine, Syria, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, etc., boycotted the Jewish Israelis because 26 Palestinians had been killed in Gaza that morning and because participants from their delegations in the previous year had problems with all the publicity when they returned home. I was not aware of the boycott and just kept trying to connect. The people from Arab and Muslim states were not so responsive but on the last day, the

Palestinian boycott organizers said, "Thank you, you never stopped smiling or trying to speak to us. This meant so much to us and the boycott was really was a mistake – you are the people we should have come to to get our story out." This is the real peace work.

What's next?

During the violence in Sderot and Gaza last January, it was clear to me that Palestinian and Israeli activists needed to maintain relations and support each other, so I organized two weekend gatherings at the Dead Sea. At the first event, 100 Israelis and Palestinians came, and the next, 150 came – about 60 percent were Palestinians from Ramallah, Jerusalem, Hebron, Nablus and Bethlehem and Beduin from across the Negev and the North. Everyone brought food, wood, tents, water. We had sharing circles, prayers, workshops and just hung out for a few days.

For so many Palestinian and Israeli organizations, it is difficult to find meeting places, let alone in a nourishing and rejuvenating environment. It is often humiliating and time consuming for Palestinians to get permits to enter Israel. So often we travel abroad to meetings in the US, Turkey and Jordan, spending thousands of dollars. But there is a common vision to build a permanent retreat center in part of the West Bank that has easy access to Israelis and Palestinians. It will be built in an ecological way, and use permaculture and other sustainability and renewable energy techniques, in a natural setting. This will be created by Israelis, Palestinians and internationals, some of whom will live on site in the community. This will be a place I could settle in, trade my caravan for a simple home and start creating my own tribe.

In the short term, in addition to my other Middle East projects, my next step is moving my home to its winter location at the Dead Sea for two or three months and continuing to hold joint retreats and gatherings in nature, including one in January for Palestinian and Israeli women.

How do you finance these projects?

Fund-raising is so time consuming and often filled with great letdowns. I wish to have access to enough funds to be able to run these events in peace and provide scholarships if needed. But maybe this is part of my inner work, to plan in the belief that things will work out; that somehow adequate funds will arrive as this good work is so needed.

Many people say that this kind of work is the work of hippies who live in their own world and are just small drops in the sea and have no influence. How would you respond?

First, peace begins with each of us, so I work on myself and see how my experiences have transformed me. Then I see all the people I have met and touched and helped to meet others, and I have seen their transforma-



HOME SWEET HOME: 'I use a camper, not as a car but as my home, parked alone in forests, deserts, by riverbanks, beaches, in friends' backyards and in Beduin villages.'

tions when they put a face and story to the monster or when they simply begin to understand why people act and think as they do. I think focusing on the negative creates more of what we don't want. I seek out the good and I find it and slowly try to understand more sides, more aspects.

I have faith in the human spirit and the power of love. Hatred is learned, so it can be unlearned. As Gandhi said, we need to be the change we want to see. One Arava alumna from Amman used to wear a full black burka and financially supported Hamas operations against Israel. Now she works in Jordan for a joint Israeli-Jordanian youth initiative. Building this kind of trust happens one person at a time, one meeting at a time and over time. All year people – Israelis, Arabs, Beduin – are calling me to ask when the next gathering is. There is a hunger for connection and learning.

You grew up in an Orthodox, Zionist home and now you study and pray with shamans, sheikhs and clerics and citizens of every religion. How do you define yourself now?

I'm a soul from the universe and from the same source as all beings, it's just been given so many different names. I was born into certain labels and I'm so grateful for all that has given me. Whatever conditioning I have received from my family and schooling, I am trying to observe and keep choosing what is true for me. When I'm representing Jews in the Arab world, my deep connection to Judaism comes up and I love the mystic and shamanic aspects that basically say the same things as all the other wisdoms. I am really trying to show this side of Judaism to the world.

Do you stay in touch with your Beduin family?

If I am in the country, which is not too often, I always go to visit, and even once my mum came, too. Last week, on the eve of Shabbat and the Muslim festival of Id al-Adha, I went to visit them. I received a beautiful welcome of kisses and hugs, and we sat around the fire, drinking tea, eating sweets and chatting.

Come sunset, I took two small candles out from my bag and told Hanan, the 19-year-old daughter, that it was my prayer time. She smiled and said, "Of course" followed by "Shabbat Shalom!" In her room, I lit the candles, praying for the light of the Shabbat to be with this family, this village, this tribe, all peoples and the world. I sang some songs from the Kabbalat Shabbat service and welcomed the special Shabbat angels to come.

My eyes shut, and in deep prayer, I became aware of someone behind me. It was Hanan, she had dressed in her prayer clothes and laid out her prayer carpet, and began the Muslim prayer. We continued, each in her own language, but to the same source, two women, one Muslim, one Jew, there in a small room, in the midst of a Beduin village, praying. To me this felt perfect – no need for compromise, no need for one of us to stop and give space to the other; no need to convince the other of another way, but together – with mutual respect. To me this is peace, this is unity. This is love.

What was the best advice you ever got?

When I left to travel for the first time, my older brother wrote me a farewell greeting, whose closing words were, "Trust everyone." ■