

## **...once upon a time, there were footsteps of light... About the power of storytelling and fairytales in a Crisis Area**

Gaza in the year 2010 with its 1.6 millions inhabitants, more than half of them are children and youth. In spite of the glittering sunlight - Sinai and the desert are very close - there is an impression of darkness in the atmosphere. A high wall surrounds the so called Gaza strip, a part of Palestine, in the North, East and South of its 360 square kilometers. The west side offers a wide view to the Mediterranean sea. In the morning and at night, quite often machine gunfire is being heard from there. The widespread sight onto the sea and the horizon gives just an illusion of freedom. Three nautical miles off the coast (Oslo agreements said it should be 20) fishermen are violently controlled not to sail farther than this. Most of the houses in the country are grey. Out of ruins new bricks are being produced. Distress is in the air.

My interpreter (from english into arabic) and me are visiting kindergartens, everywhere in the small country, in villages, cities. We are sent by the Al Quattan Center for the Child in Gaza City, the Friends of Waldorf Education, dep. emergency pedagogy and the German Foreign Office.

In most of the kindergartens we do not see toys nor playing kids. They are like schools for the youngest ones. They very early have to learn reading and writing as to their parents wish. "Storytelling" is meant as reading from books, showing Comics. Storytelling for most of those who work with children is mainly teaching a lesson in order to influence behavior. My mission is to tell fairy tales, to give images which respond the childrens' own need for inner pictures and give them images for their own development of self confidence, boldness, curiosity.

We were lead to a room, where a class of intimidated small children of 4 and 5 years was brought. Open doors, people coming and going, taking fotos or chatting, even on mobiles. We kindly ask to close the door and avoid disturbing in order to create a space for concentration and attentiveness. We ask and help the children to sit in a circle, which for them is not a custom. They are used to sit in a square. We start with a little poem of sun, moon and stars, making gestures, which children like to imitate. The performance begins now with my introducing a hen of plush which is loudly producing 3 eggs, a yellow, a blue and a red one on which she is put to brood.

Now it is the right moment to start a tale. We introduce a grandfather who has a little seed, the seed of a carrot in his hand. (Originally in the Russian tale it is a turnip seed, but turnips are not known in Palestine.) The imagination of the seed and its surrounding is growing, we put it into the earth, water it, grandfather asks the carrot

to grow - and it grows more and more, it becomes strong and big, and when it is time, grandfather wants to pull it out. But the carrot sticks tightly in the earth. Then grandmother comes to help, they are pulling both of them, but - no - the carrot does not come out. Further helpers are the little grandson, the dog, the cat, and finally a little mouse bites the tail of the cat, pulls - and - whops - the carrot slips slightly out. Everybody is happy, children, educators and storytellers.

Now we look what is under the hens belly - and little chicks come out of the nest. A yellow, a blue and a red one. The red chick is a bit naughty and jumps towards the children. Several times, it does not want to go to sleep. There is no more timidity, just laughing and giggling.

After more than 50 times performing the little story and puppet play, a trace of joy is behind us.

Once upon a time, there were footsteps of light on a dark land...