

MAY / 2018

# Israel70 | Schooling for Peace: an interview with Dr Nava Sonnenschein

by Ruth Ebenstein

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Dr Nava Sonnenschein interviewed by Vice News Tonight, Youtube. Screenshot.

Dr Nava Sonnenschein is one of the founding members of the binational egalitarian community, Neve Shalom – Wahat al-Salam. In this interview with Ruth Ebenstein, Sonnenschein explains how she came to build 'School for Peace' and explain why Israel, now aged 70, will eventually have to come to terms with its past if it wants to make peace with its neighbour and fulfil the Zionist dream of her parents.

INTRODUCTION

Dr. Nava Sonnenschein's family history reads like a page from a textbook on Israel's Zionist founders. Her personal history reads like a page from a textbook on the ways in which Jews and Palestinian Arabs can live together in harmony and equality.

Sonnenschein is one of the four founding families that created Neve Shalom – Wahat al-Salam ('Oasis of Peace'), a binational egalitarian community of Jewish and Palestinian-Arab citizens of Israel, located on one of the two Latrun hilltops overlooking the Ayalon Valley. She is also a founder and director of the country's first and only School for Peace, located in the same community. Since 1980, Sonnenschein has taught some 70,000 Israelis and Palestinians aged 16-72 how to dialogue-around-conflict, using a signature method that she helped develop at the School for Peace.

Was this pioneering path a natural progression of her family's values, or did it constitute a sea change?

'Oh, it was a bit of both,' chuckles Sonnenschein in her office at Neve Shalom – Wahat al-Salam, overlooking fig trees, pomegranate trees and pine. 'I've continued the social justice values upon which I was raised, but I've also blazed trails of a different sort.'

Both of Sonnenschein's parents immigrated to Palestine from Europe in 1939 as refugees fleeing the Nazis. Their biographies feature elements prominently woven into the founding narrative of the state. Her father, Aharon Martinovich, hailed from Michlovece, Slovakia, and entered the country legally with his then-wife, Haviva Reik. Martinovich and Reik helped found Kibbutz Maanit, near Karkur, part of Hashomer Hatzair's Kibbutz Haartzvi movement. Little did he know that while he tilled the land and debated Socialism versus Communism, every member of his extended family was being slaughtered in Europe. After divorcing Martinovich, Reik was one of 30-some parachutists sent in 1942 by the Jewish Agency on missions to Nazi-occupied Europe. She was captured and killed, and earned a hallowed place in the Zionist pantheon.

Sonnenschein's mother, Pnina Guterman, hailed from Lvov, Poland. She was Martinovich's second wife. Guterman came to Israel illegally, in 1939, on the *Tiger Hill*, a boat that sailed from Constantia with some 750 immigrants on board. Guterman worked as an accountant at the Dead Sea Factory and dreamed of buying a plot in Tel Aviv and bringing her parents and siblings to Palestine. Her vision disintegrated when she learned that they had all been murdered and hurled into a mass grave in Poland.

Guterman and Martonovich, the only survivors of their respective families, met in Haifa and married in June 1945. The younger of their two daughters, Nava, was born a mere five years after the establishment of the State of Israel, in 1953. I sat down with Sonnenschein to discuss the occasion of Israel's 70<sup>th</sup> birthday.


MY ZIONISM

Ruth Ebenstein: Israel is celebrating its 70<sup>th</sup> year. What do you think of when you think of Zionism?


Nava Sonnenschein: For me, Zionism connects to my parents fleeing the atrocities of Europe and choosing to come here, rather than settle in the US or elsewhere. There are those who believe that Zionism is just classic colonialism. That's not the case; it's more complicated. My parents came as refugees. At the same time, they were settlers and the Palestinians were natives living in the land. For some, that might be a bitter pill to swallow, but we have to recognise that.




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


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


Our Image of the Week is a fire precipitated by a rocket fired from Lebanon near Moshav Arviv in North Israel. The Lebanese military earlier said an Israeli drone had entered its airspace and dropped incendiary material on a forest along the Israeli-Lebanese border, 1 September.


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