

PARTNERPLAN

Muriel Pearson - Israel

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Partner Letters are normally written from the place a mission partner has been sent to, and detail everyday life, people and situations encountered and asks for prayer and support for the partner. This partner has been based in the Gorbals in Glasgow since taking up her post, stymied by Covid regulations and Visa procedures since the beginning of September.



I have been engaged, however, as much as I can be. I have taken part in Zoom board meetings for the **Scots' Hotel and Guest House and Tabeetha School**. I have met with **Friends of St Andrew's Jerusalem** <https://www.standrewsjerusalem.org/friends/> and taken part in the **St Andrew's Day Service** in St Cuthbert's Edinburgh in November. I am studying Arabic, using Duolingo and also (more seriously) with a teacher based in Bethlehem, again by Zoom. Emails from potential pilgrims looking for advice or a worship service or to connect with the minister of St Andrew's Jerusalem and Tiberias have been steady, but are now increasing as travel opens up again.

I have also been engaging with the congregation and friends of St Andrew's Jerusalem and Tiberias online and by leading and taking part in worship on a Sunday evening. Despite the limitations of all this 'zooming', I have been getting to know folk a bit and am really looking forward to the day when I will be a partner in residence in Tiberias.

Having an unexpected hiatus has given me time to read and to participate in seminars and workshops online, particularly those run by **The Balfour Project** <https://balfourproject.org/> . I have also watched some films and attended a workshop at Glasgow's Centre for Culture and the Arts celebrating Glasgow's twinning with the city of Bethlehem which introduced me to some interesting projects. <https://www.bethlehemculturalfestival.com/> One of them, **Skatepal**, builds skateparks across the West Bank. <https://www.skatepal.co.uk/projects> When land is at such a premium it is amazing to hear about mayors and village councils looking for support to create

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something for their young people. Another inspirational speaker talked about the **Palestine Marathon**. <https://www.palestinemarathon.org/reg-info/77.html> It is impossible to run 26 miles without falling foul of borders and checkpoints, so the route has to be repeated and twist back on itself. Dedicated marathon runners from around the world may come to 'bag' another marathon, but they are introduced to the reality of life under Occupation at the same time.

Having time has allowed me to listen to pod casts and follow up leads I might not otherwise have paid attention to. One such link came by Twitter from my predecessor Rev Kate McDonald. She recommended listening to a podcast by The Shalom Hartman Institute, <https://www.hartman.org.il/> in which two old friends debate issues of the day from a Jewish perspective. The recommended podcast is entitled 'The Two 'A' words: Apartheid and Antisemitism'. Donniel Hartman and Yossi Klein Levi were in agreement about the polarising effect of these two words, and the impossibility of genuine dialogue after one of these word bombs is thrown. The debate preceded the publication of Amnesty International's new report 'Israel's Apartheid against Palestinians: A look into decades of Oppression and Domination'. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/campaigns/2022/02/israels-system-of-apartheid/> Donniel Hartman called both the word apartheid and the word antisemitism 'conversation stoppers'. They agreed that once these words are in play they stop engaging with the issues and go immediately into a defensive mode.

It was a fascinating conversation to eavesdrop into, and great context for their next podcast which addresses the Amnesty report itself. For just as they predicted, the framing of the report as an investigation of Israeli Apartheid meant they could not engage with the factual content of the report at all. They had to reject it outright as a fundamental attack on the Jewish state and their right to exist: as antisemitic, in other words.

Amnesty International have been careful to say explicitly they are not drawing an equivalence between apartheid in South Africa pre-1994 but drawing on human rights' treaties drawn up by the international community. However, the use of this 'A' word means that reaction from Israel's supporters has been visceral and their rejection absolute. Our two bloggers could not bring themselves to read beyond the executive summary. They experience the report as an assault. They said it has no nuance, no hint of the point of view of the other side and no room for self-reflection: 'All one can do as an Israeli is push back.'

And yet as good Israelis, and good Jews, who want Israel to be the best it can be and want to engage with the morality of the current situation, these are surely the dialogue partners needed to effect change.

The manifest injustice of the current situation for Palestinians in Israel, in Gaza and the West Bank and in exile is laid out fully in the Amnesty International report. But how much does the report contribute to shifting the current impasse, where although the Palestinian suffering, institutionalised as it is, is greater, both sides suffer.

As a person of peace, interested in dialogue and aware that polarising conversation is sterile, I have been reflecting about how space for listening can be created. Gardner & Gardner's 'I will learn to sit with you and I will learn to listen' which was on display at Glasgow Cathedral throughout COP26 offers an opening. In front of a tumble of chairs, jumbled and precariously balanced, 'symbolising unequal power relationships among individuals, communities and nations' sat two chairs restrung in bright yellow, face to face at speaking distance. Here is the space to listen. Peter and Heidi have gifted me two of the chairs, to be taken with me, thanks to the generosity of the Friends of St Andrew's Jerusalem. I don't know yet where or how they will be used, but I hope they will continue to inspire me to seek creative ways to go beyond polarising word bombing to create space for human encounter through genuine listening.

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You will be able to follow my adventures through Twitter @murielpearson60, on Facebook and via blogs and short videos. <https://wordpress.com/view/murielpearson.com>

Thank you for your support and your prayers,
Shalom/salaam
Muriel