

Lifegate in January 2024

The war in our country is now almost 4 months old and there are still 136 people from Israel in the hands of Hamas. Rockets are still being fired at Israeli cities and the Israeli army is fighting in Gaza, trying to hit and destroy a sophisticated network of tunnels, larger than the London Underground network and packed with weapons. More than 10,000 Hamas fighters have mingled with the civilian population in Rafiah on the Egyptian border in the south of the Gaza Strip and are returning to other parts of Gaza via the tunnel system to fire rockets at Israel. Iranian-backed Hezbollah in Lebanon and Iraqi pro-Iranian groups are attacking Israel and American military bases in the region on a daily basis and America, after the killing of three American soldiers and many wounded in Jordan by pro-Iranian militias, attacked 85 targets of these groups and is considering withdrawing its troops on the other side.

The tone towards Iran is becoming harsher. Israel has bowed to American and international pressure and allowed daily food convoys and gasoline supplies (which absurdly also supply diesel generators that power the Hamas tunnel system) to reach the Gaza Strip. Hamas take over the deliveries by force of arms and give first access to Hamas supporters. Many people in Israel try to prevent these humanitarian deliveries by means of street barricades until the hostages are released.

Large tent cities in the south of the Gaza Strip do not provide any real protection for the 1.3 million refugees from northern Gaza from the heavy rains and now cool temperatures. A human tragedy is looming among the people who have fled, and it continues to spread. Egypt wants to prevent the expansion of these people into Egyptian territory (half of Rafah is Egyptian) at all costs. Relations with Israel are very tense; all weapons financed by Qatar and Iran have entered the Gaza Strip through the Egyptian border. Israel wants to control this border itself in the future, Egypt does not want to allow this. In Jordan, the first restaurant with the name "7 October" has opened, what bad taste in a country that has officially signed a peace treaty with Israel and receives part of its important drinking water from Israel.

There is still no end in sight to the fighting and the release of the hostages is not within reach, despite international efforts and new negotiations involving the USA, Qatar, Egypt and Israel. At least six weeks of ceasefire and the release of 30 - 150 Hamas prisoners from Israeli jails for each Israeli hostage are being discussed. The relatives of those kidnapped are waiting for decisions. Israel is unlikely to be able to defeat a well-trained terrorist organization that is protected by the population either voluntarily or by force (other examples: Taliban in Afghanistan, Houthi militias in Yemen, Boko Haram in Africa, etc.).

And what happens when the weapons fall silent? Will the destruction of Israel, declared by Iran and implemented by its vassals, continue bit by bit or will there be further brutal attacks? Will Arab people in Gaza and the West Bank speak out for peace and reconciliation with their Jewish neighbors and recognize the state of Israel? Will Israel's right-wing hardliners stop the aggressive settlement policy and live together with their Arab neighbors in whatever form, in respect and partnership? Will it be possible to share Jerusalem without borders? Time will tell, but we continue to pray **for** and work **with** the people who want to dare to achieve real peace.



2 x sky and a little imagination:

I discovered the cloud image on the left on a Saturday morning after the church service. If we turn the whole thing upside down, we can see the outline of Israel with the Sea of Galilee above and the West Bank. This country is currently as torn apart as the clouds.

In the winter months, our evening skies are very often "blood red"! "No further explanation necessary".

Many wonderful things happened at Lifegate in January that we would like to report on.

Assistance

An aid program for people in need in our region was launched before Christmas and has so far extended to Jericho and will reach other Palestinian cities. Many people in the Bethlehem/Beit Jala area have lost their jobs and thus their income in Israel and in the local tourism industry. There are hardly any local alternatives for these people. The situation will worsen because Israel wants to replace the former Palestinian workers with people from other countries for security reasons. The cost of living, food, gasoline, water and electricity is constantly rising and people can no longer pay the bills. With the help of our social workers, we have been able to identify many of these people in need and provide them with basic food, clothing and blankets, as well as healthy wholemeal bread daily from our Lifegate bakery and a hot meal from our kitchen as part of a three-month program. People in need and evacuees from the south and north of Israel are also beneficiaries of this program and receive essential food and support! We are very grateful that a German organization with American partners is enabling us to provide this assistance, which will also be extended to the people of Gaza when the conditions are right. Programs are needed quickly and urgently to enable people in the Palestinian territories to work and earn money.



the bread is delivered to people in need in cloth bags sewn by us

Early intervention work

We are delighted that the children from distant Hebron are now reaching us again on a daily basis and that we can continue the early intervention program with them as well. Erik (our German specialist) and Sumaya (educator) promote the children's psychomotor skills (movement, sound and a group activity) with musical instruments. The temperatures that fell at the end of January, combined with heavy rainfall, have finally brought us winter. Of course, the snow is still missing, but we have replaced it with polystyrene and the "winter feeling" is complete.



Psychomotor skills with instruments



Winter at Lifegate

From the special school

Nurse students from Bethlehem University organized hygiene lessons together with support groups from our school, with many games and didactic elements. Information on food and healthy eating (shown in the picture in a Power Point presentation) deepened the approach of this program which is that we can contribute a lot to our own health.



Vocational training and (sheltered) workshops

Two young men from outside and seven pupils from our special school began a trial internship in the Lifegate workshops, which will then lead to vocational training. In the Lifegate Garden guest house, we are starting a training circuit (even without regular guests), which includes work in the guest rooms, the dining room and the garden. We hope that the young people will find a job in the many hotels and guesthouses in Bethlehem in the future.

In our textile departments, we sew shopping bags from fabric remnants and give them out to people with our bread, thereby contributing to environmental protection in our region and encouraging people to go shopping with their fabric bags. We are pleased with the positive feedback from the sale of gift items made at Lifegate in the USA and have already received a large repeat order for our embroidery department. Over 20 people with disabilities who have learned this craft with us, and are practicing it at home, can thus continue to be provided with work and wages by us. Our olive oil has already arrived in Germany and we are now packaging the thyme spice zatar, which is a very popular accompaniment to olive oil. We purchased it in the Qatar in Nablus (Shechem) because of the usual good quality and it is currently being packed in our workshops for transportation to Germany.



...first experience with a cordless screwdriver...



All the young people in our workshops are enjoying their daily routine and the weekly wheelchair basketball training has also resumed. We are particularly pleased that, thanks to a "sporting donation", we were able to order new basketball wheelchairs after more than 10 years of this program, as many of our old sports chairs could no longer be repaired.

Lifegate Garden

Whilst we are still waiting for travel and pilgrimage groups from all over the world, we can enjoy the peace and quiet in our little oasis in the middle of Bethlehem that we have almost to ourselves. We look forward to seminar guests from the country who use our rooms and also about the fact that German friends are still hoping to be our guests at Pentecost. May these wishes come true and may Lifegate Garden continue to provide people with rest, strength and peace on their journey.



Young people meet to discuss topics in their lives (today: How to prevent bullying in a team)

Stories that made us particularly happy:

A delegation of Benedictine monks from the Dormition in Jerusalem visited us in January to present us with a check from the annual Christmas campaign: "Carry a light from Bethlehem into the world."

We are very happy about our long-standing friendship with this abbey in Jerusalem, the monastery in Tabgha (our annual leisure time with people from Israel) and the pilgrims' house by the Sea of Galilee.



all the names of the "light recipients" are immortalized on a roll

Amani is a young lady who lived in a Lifegate women's residential group from 1990 to 1992. After this time, she returned to her parents' home in Ramallah, studied English and is still involved in helping people with disabilities in Ramallah. She has often given us contact addresses of people who needed a wheelchair or other aids. Amani never asked anything for herself. When she told us about falls, injuries and hospital stays, we found out that her own wheelchair had not been safe for a long time and was causing her a lot of problems. We contacted friends in Germany and the donation for a new wheelchair was found. Amani now has a suitable new wheelchair and her quality of life and mobility have significantly improved and now she can continue to take care of the needs of many people with disabilities in her city.



Amani and Besan (in the background our early intervention manager Natalin)

Besan began her life many years ago in our early intervention kindergarten. Now aged 21 and a graduate, she came to thank her former Early Intervention Director and Lifegate. She and her mother were full of appreciation and gratitude for the start in life that Lifegate gave her. Besan is a young confident lady and is now looking for a job as an accountant. We are happy to see the "fruits", some of which we may only recognize years later, but it is never too late for good news! (Besan attends her old kindergarten)

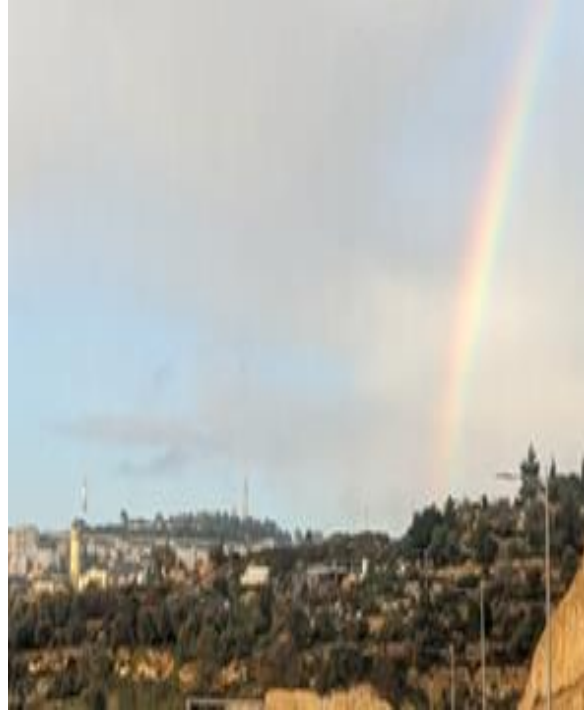


An elderly Muslim lady was provided with a specially adapted wheelchair by our aids department. She was filled with joy and gratitude and literally said to our employee during a home visit: "You Christians really are the light and salt of the earth" without you, our country would be totally dark.

Three Muslim ladies, three times thank you. There is always hope, given to you just when you need it most!

When your heart is heavy with the news of war, when the stories of suffering and hopelessness take over. When you don't know whether your family will see each other again in good health in the evening and loved ones are suddenly no longer with us, how can you go on, endure and give hope?

One morning, God simply put a rainbow over the road on my way to Beit Jala.



"Look, do you see **My** old promise to Noah? I want people to live! That also applies to you and I have promised it to you personally in my Son Jesus. You are His and My child. I will not leave you alone, I will comfort you, I will give you strength and love. Trust me, my strength is powerful in weak people. We have a covenant of love that stands and that sustains, rely on me!"

We wish you God's rich blessing and support and we pray that you continue at our side, with our loving greetings

Yours, Burghard Schunkert and the Lifegate team