



**For Equality in Education**

**Good education – accessible to all is the key to individual and social prosperity.**

For more than two decades **Hila** has trained and supported parents in Israel to become actively involved in raising their children's academic achievements. By focusing on the socio-economic periphery, **Hila** has placed thousands of children in educational tracks that lead to matriculation and higher education. **Hila** is a grassroots training and advocacy organization dedicated to confronting inequality in the educational system.

## **November 2012**



### **Dear Friends and Supporters!**

It was a long hard summer. As you all know by now, Tikva Levi, Hila's Manager passed away in August at the young age of 52 after fighting a rapid and aggressive illness. It has been hard to understand that one day she was here speaking of the future and the next she was gone. I lost my bearings for a while and also my words - cancelling the last newsletter, however the Hila team was strong and continued to meet parents in Arabe, Arara, Ashdod, Kalanswa, Nahariya, Ofakim, Ramle and Usufiya. I will write about our activities in the next newsletter and in this issue publish 2 texts about Tikva written by co activists and friends. The last page invites you to our upcoming weekend seminar.

Before managing Hila, Tikva studied Literature at the Hebrew University where she was very active on campus; many of her strong ideas and feelings were expressed in poetry that was never published in Hebrew. The poems were however translated and published in an anthology in the United States. The book "*Keys to the Garden: New Israeli Writing*" was compiled by Ammiel Alcalay and features 24 Israeli writers whose families originated from - the Levant, Turkey, Iran, India, and Arab worlds. I recommend reading it. With Ammiel's permission I am sharing one of Tikva's shorter poems below.

*Caroline Freeman, Resource Development Coordinator*

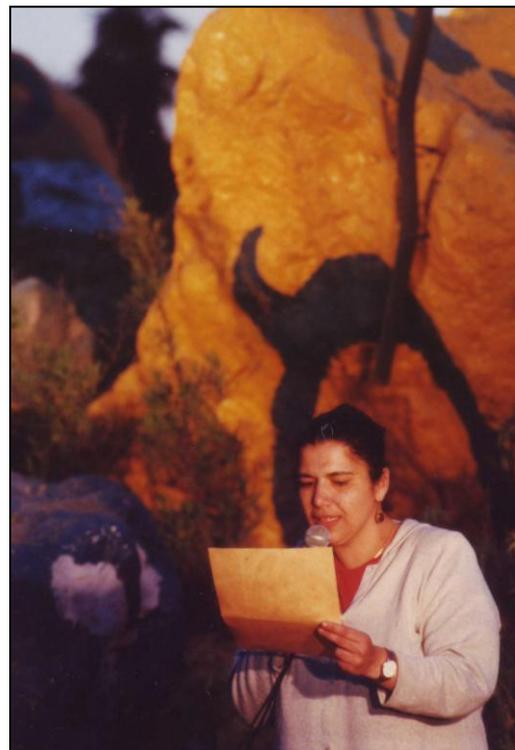
### **To the Life of Plants on the Road**

I saw them hitting the cactus  
laughing at the sight of the juice that spilled  
rubbing their palms in delight  
at every hewn leaf  
competing between them to see who would  
make the still unripe fruit fly higher  
with their stick  
finally getting off  
just as they tore out the root  
and crushed it with their heavy boots

they went off without seeing  
how a seed-bearing cloud  
slowly landed on the ground  
much bigger that the one that  
had served the butchered cactus.

I saw  
and made a blessing

*Tikva Levi, January 1988*





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**Hila's main activities:**

**Private consultation** to hundreds of parents each year whose children's rights have been violated; **Parent Empowerment Courses** give parents information and practical tools to improve the level of education and diagnose local educational problems; **Weekend seminars** about Educational Equality for Arab and Jewish parent groups; **Publications** in Hebrew, Amharic and Arabic with pertinent, detailed information about the Israeli education system; and **Public Campaigns** which focus on enhancing parents and pupil's rights in education.

### **Tikva Levi: The Loss of a Lioness**

*By Dr. Tilde Rosmer*

In July this year Tikva Levi, passed away at the age of 52. Her tragic death means that Israel has lost one of its finest grassroots activists.

Tikva spent more than twenty years of work devoted to campaigning for all of Israel's citizens to gain equal rights to education, regardless of their faith, ethnicity or other identity. She has been described as a 'Mizrahi feminist' and also as a 'radical leftist' for her views on the Israeli-Palestinian question. Tikva was a rare lioness who combined local activism in the national field of education; a critical perspective based on her Mizrahi (Middle Eastern and North African, MENA) ethnic belonging; opposition to the Israeli occupation of various territories; and support for a state for all its citizens in Israel.

Tikva's political and social consciousness developed early on. She grew up in the development town of Ashkelon. Her parents were Iraqi Communists and as a teenager she joined the Communist youth club. In school Tikva was found to be a 'gifted student' and was sent to boarding school in Jerusalem on a state-funded scholarship. She described how, in Jerusalem she was taught to look down on her parents' Arab Iraqi background and became alienated from it. The Arabic language, food and customs with which she was raised were replaced by Hebrew and European equivalents. She and the other 'gifted' MENA Jewish pupils were taught that Hebrew and European culture was better and more sophisticated. Like many other MENA Jewish Israelis, Tikva described how the Israeli veneration for European culture created a complicated relationship for children of MENA descent with their own background and also with their parents. As if to counter this, Tikva studied

Palestinian Arabic poetry at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem and always stayed close to her Arab Jewish roots, language and culture.

I met Tikva when I was invited to do fieldwork for my PhD in HILA, the organisation she worked in for more than twenty years. As HILA's director, she guided me through the difficulties in education faced by underprivileged citizens of Israel, predominantly those of Palestinian, MENA and Ethiopian Jewish ethnicity in the Israeli education system. From her and the rest of the dedicated staff in HILA, I learnt the true meaning of the methodology of empowerment. HILA practices this methodology by teaching parents about their rights and their children's rights and also assists individuals and groups of parents in undertaking action to secure and maintain these rights. In addition to working across the country with individual parents and groups of parents, HILA conducts weekend seminars where representatives from all parent groups participate. It was at one such seminar held in the Palestinian-Jewish village Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam that I had the pleasure of witnessing a rare example of joint activism between Israeli citizens of Palestinian, Ethiopian and MENA Jewish background. It is a testament to the hard work of Tikva and HILA that such groups were able to work together as equals in an environment marked by intense conflict, suspicion and de facto segregation.

***To me, losing Tikva means losing a true heroine, a dear friend and a rare light in the often dark Israeli-Palestinian landscape.*** My heart goes out to her family, friends, colleagues and fellow activists in HILA and beyond who have lost a central force in their lives and in their ongoing struggle to seek equality in Israel.

RIP



### Hila's Goals

- A. Empowering parents to become an influencing factor within and for the improvement of the education system
- B. Advancing and developing social and educational projects to improve educational achievements and the expand social involvement
- C. Influencing the Ministry of Education's policy to maintain the rights of parents and children

### The Feminist Legacy of Tikva Levi

by Vered Oppenheimer

It was the life work of Hila's manager of 25 years, the late Tikva Levi, to break down institutional patterns of discrimination in education by helping one child at a time. However there was another dimension of Hila's struggle for social justice: the long-established tradition of feminist activity associated with Hila, and its contribution to Israeli feminism.

As politically active feminists, the leadership of Hila has always supported gender related issues and most applicants to Hila are women, a fact reflecting the gendered division of labor in the family wherein mothers are perceived as primarily responsible for child rearing and education.

In an interview from 1991 Tikva Levi said:

"The women [who contact us] feel that they have not realized their potential in most cases. They know that they could have achieved much more, had they been given the opportunity to obtain a proper education and could save their children. When a woman does win this battle, it becomes much easier for her to overcome other patriarchal structures...The women [in our parent groups] soon realize that they have a lot in common. They support one another and unite over far greater issues than educational problems in their communities."

From this stance of mother-oriented community-based feminism, tailored to the needs of disadvantaged women, a group of Hila activists and "grassroots" women took part in organizing the 8th, 9th and 10th Israeli National Feminist Conferences in the 1990s.

In addition, a group of feminists connected to Hila, including Tikva Levi, Noga Dagan-Buzaglo, Ronit Chacham, Ella Shohat and Tikva Honig-Parnas, alongside other activists, initiated the first Israeli conference for minority ethnic women.



The conference took place in 1996 under the slogan: **"We are Here and This is Ours"**. It brought together over 400 Mizrahi, Ashkenazi, Ethiopian and Arab women from a wide range of social economic status, and political agendas. The conference embodied Tikva's vision of Mizrahi feminism as a radical coalition, based on embracing diversity and respecting each others' rights.

Tikva's and other activists' uncompromising commitment to the "grassroots" women challenged the dominant liberal feminist discourse in Israel, broadening its boundaries around issues of ethnicity, class, "race", and sexuality. Thereby, Hila helped the women's movement in Israel reach a heightened sensitivity for the needs of those who face racism and poverty as well as sexism; and contributed to the realization that the strength of the movement does not derive from its uniformity but from its ability to include a wide range of social locations and women's critical voices.



**For Equality in Education**

**Hila** works with Jews and Arabs, Veterans and New Immigrants and for the past 24 years, graduates of our activities have raised academic achievements and improved conditions at schools across the country.

**Hila's** advocacy has also led to significant improvements on a national level: increased parent rights in special education placement procedures; tighter supervision on dispensation of psychiatric drugs to pupils; and increased transparency in schools.

**Hila** is unique - it is not sectorial. and works with diverse population groups.

## Planned Programs

We are very pleased to welcome you to **Hila's 2012 Weekend Seminar** in Neve Shalom which will take place December 7-8<sup>th</sup>.



*Panel about "High School Diplomas for All" Weekend Seminar 2011*

This year's topic is **"Parents Involvement in the School Curriculum"**. Some of the problems that will be addressed in lectures, a panel of educational experts and in smaller workshops are:

1. Schools that lag behind the basic curriculum - i.e. they only teach part of a program or use unauthorized books.
2. Gaps between formal curriculum and the culture of the community - how parents can introduce their cultural heritage into school activities
3. Discipline and punishment - the general regulations and rules set by the Ministry of Education
4. Extra curriculum hours (school trips, cultural events etc) – there are a number of programs that the school can choose between that vary in content and cost. Parents have a right to be involved in this choice.
5. Other initiatives in schools where parents should be heard such as health programs, ceremonies and joint activities for parents and pupils etc

The full agenda is attached to this newsletter. Please contact us if you are interested in joining us.

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Find more information about Hila on our website: [www.hila-equal-edu.org.il](http://www.hila-equal-edu.org.il)

Support Hila's Facebook group: <https://www.facebook.com/hila.equal.edu>  
Help us spread the word!