Born into a family that took a major leadership role in the First Palestinian Intifada / uprising, Shadi Abu Awwad was imbued from a young age with deep Palestinian patriotism and activism – and with a fierce hatred of Israelis.

An Orthodox rabbi and passionate Zionist settler, Rabbi Hanan Schlesinger has lived most of his life in the West Bank where Palestinian make up 90% of the population. Yet 33 years past until he first had a real conversation with a Palestinian.

That Palestinian was Shadi’s uncle Ali. Rabbi Hanan was profoundly transformed by his friendship with Ali and with other Palestinians. His understanding of the reality of the Middle East conflict and of Zionism was utterly complicated by the parallel universe that they introduced him to.

Shadi’s brother was shot and almost killed by an Israeli soldier. An Israeli doctor heroically saved his brother’s life. Confounded by the contradiction, Shadi began a journey that ultimately brought him to see a human being and a partner on the other side.

Roots, the Israeli Palestinian grassroots initiative for understanding, nonviolence and transformation, was founded five years ago by Rabbi Hanan, Ali and other local activists to build bridges of reconciliation between the two sides.

Shadi created the Roots youth program and was its first director. Local Palestinian and Israeli teenagers, who would otherwise never met each other, learn to acknowledge each other's humanity and become a new type of leader who can work together with the other side – and not against it – to create a better future for their peoples.

We invite you to join Shadi and Hanan as they share their personal, interconnected stories and present the groundbreaking and challenging grassroots work of Roots. They do not come with blueprinted peace plans in hand, but with the deep conviction that human understanding and trust are the prerequisites for lasting justice, freedom, and peace in that little sliver of land they both call home.

Updated May 2019