

Searching for Peace in Palestine and Israel

Every story has two sides at least, and perhaps 10,000 sides that are true to the experience and understanding of the people of many religions, cultures, ethnicities, and nations. We present multiple perspectives on the horror currently unfolding in Palestine and Israel, located in the region of the Middle East, known as Palestine.

News media has described in details the horrible Hamas attack of Oct. 7th, 2023 that killed over 1200 people in southern Israel and ignited this current wave of violence.

After the Ottoman Empire was defeated in the World War I, the League of Nations gave the British government a mandate to administer Palestine. After the Jewish people were promised a homeland in Palestine in the 1917 Balfour Declaration, waves of Jews, mostly from Eastern Europe, began moving to Palestine. The United Nations passed Resolution 181(II) in Nov. 1947 to create two states—one for the Jews, and another Palestinian Arabs. In 1948, as many as 15,000 Palestinians were killed by Jewish paramilitary troops, another 750,000 Palestinians fled in fear or were forcibly removed, and Israel declared independence on May 14, 1948 (*and the U.S. recognized it just 11 minutes later!*) The U.S. has given almost \$260 billions in military and financial aid to Israel over the years.

Our goal in covering this conflict is not to take a side. We acknowledge everyone's suffering, and in doing so, search for a way out of the spiral of violence. Einstein famously observed that you can't solve a problem with the same sort of thinking that created the problem in the first place. How can we climb, together, to that higher ground of peace-making, mutual respect, and justice?

In this feature, we offer diverse perspectives on the issues. We also acknowledge that there are many disagreements that need to be resolved with mutual understanding and compromises; with respect for the security and needs of both the Palestinians and Israelis. We hope and pray for a peaceful and fair solution so everyone is able to *live* in peace.

Art by Anamaría Vásquez, a Colombian artist living in Mexico.

Let's quote Persian poet Hafiz (c.1320–1389) who deeply understood the nature of human violence and how it must eventually end.

"I have come into this world to see this:
the sword drop from men's hands
even at the height of
their arc of
rage
because we have finally realized
there is just one flesh
we can wound."

(Love Poems from God, p.160. Daniel Ladinsky, ed.)

We thank all the contributors for their writings, as well as Paul Dix for the photos (*which were taken long before the current war*) that appear in this feature.

Salaam, Shalom, Peace, Shanti.



Peace in Palestine

I was born and raised in Bethlehem, Palestine. From June 1967 to October 1968, I lived under the Israeli occupation, which was long enough for me to know that wasn't how I wanted to live my life. That's partially why I live here in Oregon. My family still lives and suffers in the West Bank.

It was easy for me to see that there is *no* warm, fuzzy, and benevolent form of occupation. It was also easy for me to see clearly that you can't be a democracy while you rule over and occupy a population against their will. These two are diametrically opposed. *You can't have your cake and eat it too!* Even if you are the state of Israel.

I won't discuss the historical conflicts and wars between the occupied and the occupier; and these have been numerous. I'd rather *fast forward* to the question: "Is peace possible in my homeland? Will I see it in my lifetime?"

My answer is a simple one: When every human being in that area is granted their human rights! Human rights belong to each one of us by the virtue of being born as a human being. Governments can only take them (or some of them) away from their rightful owners. And, when the authorities give us some of these rights back us, we applaud them. That seems crazy to me!

I say peace is more possible when there is justice; when that justice does not mean "Just Us." When there is equality for everyone, regardless of anything other than they are human; when there is safety and security; when there is food and medical care for all; when there is freedom for all.

Peace is possible when extremists on *both sides* (of the conflict) are not the ones that rule the day; when settler colonizing is not allowed, encouraged, and supported by the most right-wing government in the history of Israel.

Peace will have a better chance when Palestinian land is not regularly confiscated, and when the settlers not use the Holy Book (Bible) to show that they are the true and legitimate owners to whom that land belongs... and how dare you, a mere human being disagree with my God?

Peace does not mean "might makes right." Peace will not come to a world with double standards. Peace will not come when we use war as a viable means to solve our disputes.

But peace is possible when you feel your enemy's pain like you feel your own pain. Peace is possible when you choose collaboration, not conflict; when you make deserts bloom together; when your children play together in harmony and laughter. Peace will come when we respect each other, and we realize that we originated from the same tree of humanity. Peace will come when we stand together against antisemitism and Islamophobia, as well as other divisive trends.

Peace will come when we have the will to welcome it. Peace will come when we love our enemy like we love ourselves.

—Ibrahim Hamide, Oregon.

Below: A young girl in Om Touba, near E. Jerusalem.



Community Forum Connecting across Differences through Deep Listening & Loving Speech

On December 10, 2023, at a three-hour community forum entitled, “Israel, Palestine, and America Connecting Across Differences Through Deep Listening and Loving Speech,” more than 150 Eugene residents gathered in person at the Unitarian Universalist Church hall to listen deeply to one another and to share their own views. They were joined by more than 50 participants on Zoom. Six invited guests spoke for five minutes each, including a Palestinian American Muslim (see p. 2), a Rabbi (see p. 5), a Christian minister, a former member of the Israeli military, a Palestinian American Christian, and a retired University of Oregon professor, holding a UNESCO Chair in Interreligious Dialogue and Peace. Thereafter, members of the audience spoke for three minutes each, followed by breakout groups of three to four people. For the final twenty minutes, participants brainstormed ideas for future activism to address this tragic and complex situation.

—Barry Nobel, Oregon.

Guidelines for Sharing with Others

“Seek first to understand, then to be understood.”

—Stephen Covey

Seek first to understand:

1. Notice internal disagreements.
2. Relax & breathe.
3. Refocus with “Hmmmmmm!”
4. Listen for feelings, needs & values.

Then to be understood:

1. Speak respectfully, honestly *and* effectively.
2. Share personally (emotions, needs, hopes, fears, values).
3. Identify common interests and values.
4. Look at the Facilitator.
5. Limit sharing to 2–3 minutes.

Three Approaches to the Good

“Yesterday is history, tomorrow is a mystery,
today is a gift of God,
which is why we call it the present.”

—Bill Keane

“Learn from the past, prepare for the future,
live in the present.”

—Thomas S. Monson

Today—right now—is the time we can act to shape a more peaceful world. Although the past is history, we can learn from it to assist us in seeking the good and avoiding past mistakes. And yes, although tomorrow is a mystery, by learning from the past, we can act in the present to create a better tomorrow!

Three ethical frameworks can help us better understand the Israel-Palestine conflict and guide our behavior:

- 1) Consequences
- 2) Duty *and*
- 3) Virtue

1) **Consequences** focuses on attempting to create the best consequences for our present actions. Learning from the past is an important component of assessing future consequences. A decision that seeks to create the greatest good for the greatest number over the longest period of time requires not only that we look closely at the current situation, but also that we understand how past actions have succeeded and/or failed.

2) **Duty** focuses on our duties to our fellow beings. The duties to avoid harming others and to protect others from harm play important roles here.

3) **Virtue** theory concentrates on how to develop and employ the *best qualities of character* to be of benefit to others. Humility, honesty, and compassion (i.e., seeking to relieve suffering) are significant character traits to nurture.

Applying these three approaches to the current conflict in Israel and Palestine leads to the

Three Approaches to the Good ... continued

following suggestions:

- 1) **Consequences:** Learn more about the history of the region and the people involved (e.g., Israelis & Palestinians) to guide our actions in order to produce beneficial and long-lasting benefit for all;
- 2) **Duty:** Uphold the duties to be of benefit, and avoid harm, to one and all;
- 3) **Virtue:** Develop qualities of character (e.g., humility and honesty in the search for truth; compassion for all others) so that we can act on these virtues daily.

Keeping all three approaches in mind can help us contribute to resolving conflict and creating a kinder, more peaceful world for all.

—Barry Nobel, Oregon. He also led the community discussion after the panelists' presentations.

Who Are We?

Quakers have a tradition of learning through query. I find I have so many more questions than answers. Here are a few of them:

A history of the Middle East: We have so many opinions about such a complex region. I don't understand the area, so much so that I don't even know what I don't know. How are we informed? What are our sources? Do our sources rely on binary thought patterns? Do they allow for contradiction and complexity?

My faith leads me to the understanding that violence is not the answer. Given that, what would be an appropriate response to the kidnapping of civilians for political purposes? What does faith in action really look like?

What are reparations? Are they painless? Can reparations to one injured group (Jews) cause damage to another group (Palestinians)? How does information about this situation translate to or inform other instances of harm and redress?

Who gets to speak? When and why? Who holds power? Should we be listening more carefully to Jewish and Palestinian voices among us? Should we be listening more carefully to voices that are more distant from the issue? Does distance constitute neutrality?

Governments: Do they speak on behalf of their people? Do Biden/Trump speak for me? Does Prime minister Netanyahu speak for Israelis? For Jews?

If governments don't always speak for their people, how does one group of citizens reach out to another? How does a group of citizens reach out to influence their own government?

Cause de jour: three years from now, ten years from now, will we still be involved in Middle Eastern politics? Or is it but a moment in time? And if it is just a moment in time, does it matter? Would intersectionality speak to the depth of fleeting engagements?

How do we as a community lift each other up in difficult times? How do we reach the burning fire of certainty and action amidst confusion and complexity? How do we care for and lift up others who may have a different point of view? Are we tender to each other's emotions, and respectful to divergent lines of reasoning?

And what about you, my friends, my community—what kinds of questions do you have?

—Leila Snow, Oregon.

Both Israeli and Palestinian People Deserve Better

As a Jew, I am hurting. Not just in an abstract, humanitarian way, but because my family has been attacked. I don't personally know anyone who was killed or taken hostage, but I know many people who do. Every Jew is at most two degrees of separation from this. I am also hurting because my family is doing violence. And I know that anyone who is Palestinian is feeling this personally. If it's not happening to them, it's happening to someone they love, or at most someone that someone they love, loves.

I don't expect Israelis who are currently under rocket fire, or whose family members were murdered or abducted by Hamas (on Oct. 7th) to have a lot of energy for compassion or vision in a larger sense right now. And I don't expect Palestinians who are under siege, who are being bombed by Israel or whose families have been bombed by Israel, or whose family members have been murdered by settler extremists, to have a lot of compassion for Israelis or Jews in general right now. I understand why many Israelis label Palestinians broadly as terrorists, and why many Palestinians label Israelis broadly as colonialist occupiers.

But for people at a distance, especially those of Christian European descent: *do better. Please, do better.* It is exhausting watching you try to ally with either side. Whether you are coming down as pro-Israel or Pro-Palestinian, the people who are most vocal are expressing their "support," such as it is, mostly through the dehumanization of whichever "other" you're against. People who have any distance from this situation have the obligation to reject the notion of "sides," to bring rigorous nuance and compassion to all of these peoples, rather than acting out whatever guilt about the Holocaust or guilt about whiteness in America is motivating these extreme positions. Calling for the eradication of either people, calling for either people to exclusively have the right to self-determination there—makes it worse.

Both antisemitism and Islamophobia are on the rise right here. People of Christian European descent, please do the hard work of noticing how you are complicit in that, how you are contributing to that, what voices you are lifting up and what possibilities you are silencing with your "advocacy."

And the thing is, it's not that hard. Yes, it is hard to know what should be done in any moment, what will bring lasting peace. But it's not that hard to say that Hamas is evil, that what they did on October 7th is unmitigated evil, and that they should not be conflated with the Palestinian people, who deserve better from Israel and who have not had a free election in Gaza in over 15 years. *And, it's not that hard to say that* (Prime minister) Netanyahu and his cronies are violent, corrupt and bloodthirsty, and to also notice that the Israeli public deserves and is in fact demanding something different. *And it's not that hard to say that* the dancers and left-wing kibbutz members in the Negev did not deserve to be murdered or abducted.

If you feel moved, call for a **ceasefire**, and a return of the hostages. Demand it of both the Israeli government and of Hamas! But most of all, notice, support the amazing people organizations working for a shared society, Israelis and Palestinians, right now, despite what I said about their difficult positionality. I just want to name **Standing Together** and **A Land for All**, two amazing organizations that are working towards a positive vision of shared society with self-determination, justice and peace for all. Please look them up, amplify their message and donate to them—**Standing Together**, and **A Land for All**.

—Rabbi Ruhi Sophia Motzkin Rubenstein,
Temple Beth Israel—Center for Jewish Life
Eugene, Oregon.

These remarks were delivered by Rabbi Ruhi at the community forum (see p. 3).

The following letter was drafted collectively by Steve Goldman (organizer of the forum), Mor (one of the forum panelists), Josh Fattal, Rob Miller and Hannah Mathison, and others. The idea is to share it with friends, family, and people we know, so that many letters reach our government representatives and decision makers. Please feel free to use the letter as a model to express your feelings and share it as widely as you wish, inviting your friends to do the same. Thank you.

Dear

This letter is from concerned citizens (of Lane County, Oregon, and a few other places as noted in the signature block) some of whom came together on December 10 for a community forum “**Israel, Palestine, and America: Connecting Across Differences Through Deep Listening and Loving Speech**,” that featured Jews, Christians and Muslims) united by the need for mutual empathy.

In light of the humanitarian disaster in Gaza, we ask you to take all steps within your power to implement an immediate ceasefire and provide humanitarian aid. As Americans, many of us American Jews, we believe it is critical to raise this voice in support of the Palestinian people and common humanity.

We recognize the horrific and brutal Hamas attack of October 7, 2023 and the need for the people of Israel to be safe and secure. We believe that Israel’s response makes Israelis less safe because killing innocent people creates enemies; Israeli attacks are killing Israeli hostages (negotiations have led to hostage releases), and peacemaking holds more promise to overcoming violence.

The Israeli government’s response has resulted in more than an order of magnitude greater loss of life among Palestinians (*some 20,000 people so far—mostly women and children—as reported by news media*). Denying basic survival needs including water, food, shelter, medical care (indeed attacking the whole health care system), sanitation and mobility is cruel and deadly. Palestinians have a right to life and to be safe and secure.

The U.N. Convention Against Genocide includes prohibitions against “Killing”; “Causing serious bodily or mental harm to”; or “Deliberately inflicting...conditions of life calculated to bring about...physical destruction in whole or in part” to a religious, ethnic or racial group. The unfolding disaster is genocidal toward the Palestinian people and must end. Multiple statements from the top leadership of the Israeli government indicate its genocidal intent.

The U.S. government is providing political, financial, and military support enabling this catastrophe while simultaneously seeking to silence dissent within our country. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin warned on December 2nd that Israel’s attack on Gaza risks replacing “a tactical victory with a strategic defeat.” Our country must support efforts toward peaceful resolution, not worsening the crisis.

We call for:

- An immediate and permanent ceasefire on both sides.
- Negotiations for the release of all hostages. (Some hostages have already been released as a result of negotiations.)
- An end to U.S. support and funding for Israel’s current military campaign in Gaza.
- Immediately ending the blockade of Gaza to allow unfettered humanitarian aid
- Financial and logistical support for that humanitarian aid.
- Commencement of talks for a negotiated settlement to meet freedom, autonomy, safety, and security for Israelis and Palestinians.
- Opposition to any efforts to silence or equate dissent or opposition to Israel and the Israeli government with antisemitism. or equating support for Palestinian human rights as support for Hamas.

Yours very sincerely, _____ (your name)



(Above): A Street Scene, Gaza City. (Next page, top): In the absence of running water, people collect water for daily use, in the Dheisheh Refugee Camp, near Bethlehem, West Bank. (Next page, bottom): A Classroom in Gaza, Palestine.



Cries of the Dying Children

In the din of battle it is difficult to hear the cries of the dying children.
I get that.

Yet we must listen, or we won't have a compass to guide us, and we need one because we are lost.

Before I continue, let me disclose my background which I embrace and from which I am trying to grow.

I was raised in Germany and live in the United States. Part of my family here are Jewish, although I myself am not. At one time, my sister lived in Israel.

My parents were refugees, uprooted as children after World War II. They used the word "Flüchtlinge" (refugee) to describe their identity. The word held their pain and their pride in what they had accomplished.

I am biased, openly, emphatically, but in favor of what? In favor of whom?

Palestinians in Gaza took to the streets and protested Hamas many times since 2007, most recently in the summer of 2023. Israelis took to the streets in huge numbers to protest the Netanyahu government, also in 2023.

I find myself rooting for the Palestinians who oppose Hamas, and for the Israelis who oppose Netanyahu.

Why?

Because something isn't right when the displaced continue to be tragically pitted against—the displaced.

Today we read that more Israelis than before are leaning toward a hardline military course of action.* A similar development may be occurring in Gaza in favor of Hamas.

The terror has strengthened those who've always seen war as the only option.

There's just one problem. This war can't be won.

Few may want to hear this message in this hour of rage. The truth, the tragedy, is that with each dead child a greater horror is born.

The Old Testament talks about "an eye for an eye." What timeless wisdom, what a timeless curse.

What will tomorrow's weapons look like?

Oh, they will be bigger. On both sides.

And thus the wheel of suffering turns once again.

If there's to be a way out, a path to peace, maybe it begins by listening to the cries of the dying children.

—Joachim Shultz, Oregon.

*<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/12/19/world/middleeast/israel-oct-7-left-wing-peace.html?smid=nytcore-ios-share&referringSource=articleShare>

Dear Teenagers in the United States and Gaza Strip

Dear Teenagers in the U.S. and Gaza Strip,

I'm writing this to introduce you to one another. I know that young people hate when elders try to match-make your friendships. I know you will find one another at some point in your lifetimes without my intervention. But there's no time for that. If you accept this invitation to learn about one another sooner, it could save lives.

Sixteen-year-olds in Gaza are already "six wars old." They experienced Israeli assaults at ages 2, 5, 7, 14, 15, and right now at age 16. They have lived their entire lives under Israeli blockade, completely controlled by the Israeli military with Egypt's help on one side. This means they almost certainly have never traveled outside of the 140 square miles of the Gaza Strip, an area almost exactly the size of Las Vegas, but with three times the population. Israel claims they do not occupy the Gaza Strip, but since Israel controls Gaza's borders, airspace,

water, all imports and exports, population registry, and mobility, the Gaza Strip is considered under Israeli military occupation according to international law. Military occupation is regulated by rules of war set out in the Geneva Conventions—international agreements established after World War II.

Living under military occupation, blockade and subject to frequent military assaults is a terrible way to grow up. Sixteen-year-olds in Gaza have very limited opportunities to study and work. Mental health problems among Gaza's children are estimated at up to 80% before the current war.

And yet, youth in Gaza are known as creative and entrepreneurial. Some of the most uplifting videos during the current war are of young people teaching children to breakdance in United Nations shelters—even as bombs fall around them.

Sixteen-year-olds in the United States have also lived through historic events. They were born



Sixteen Years of Childhood in Gaza, an *infographics* by Visualizing Palestine

into a post-9/11 anti-Muslim atmosphere. They were toddlers when the U.S. elected its first Black president, Barak Obama, and pre-teens during the backlash under President Donald Trump. Today's sixteen-year-olds experienced the explosion of the movement for Black lives after the police murdered George Floyd in 2020, and saw how youth led climate activism into a new era. They lived through the proliferation of guns and the increase in school shootings. And, of course, there was COVID-19. Despite some gains, youth in the United States remain vulnerable to poverty, homelessness, and other forms of violence.

Experiences of hardship are not the only thing that connect you, teenagers of Gaza and teenagers of the United States. You are also connected by money and politics. Taxes collected in the United States have paid for hundreds of billions of dollars in aid to Israel, which Israel uses, in part, to fund their military occupation of Palestinian territory, including the Gaza Strip. When Israel has attacked Palestinians—including killing over 20,000 people (an estimated 70% of whom are women and children) in the current assault—the United States has used its significant political power to protect Israel from being held accountable.

Again, world leaders have made a mess of everything, putting the world at further risk of a regional military escalation that could become nuclear. Meanwhile, more Palestinians in Gaza are being killed everyday. The chief of the World Health Organization says a child is killed in Gaza every ten minutes. It may or may not be “fair” for youth to have to fix problems you did not cause, but surely it is more unfair for children and youth to live through unfathomable suffering while adults do not listen to your calls for reason. I am so very sorry.

Dearest teenagers in the U.S. and Gaza, I leave it to you to follow up on this introduction as you see fit.

Respectfully yours,

Nora Lester Murad

About the Author: *Nora Lester Murad is an activist, writer, & educator. Her young adult novel, Ida in the Middle (Crocodile Books, 2022), won the Arab American Book Award and a 2023 Skipping Stones Honor Award. From a Jewish family, Nora is the mother of three Palestinian-American daughters who grew up in the West Bank under Israeli military occupation. She now lives in Massachusetts on the traditional homelands of the Eastern Woodland indigenous peoples. You can reach Nora at www.NoraLesterMurad.com.*

Educational Resources:

1. For more information about young people in the Gaza Strip and other parts of Palestine, see other educational infographics by Visualizing Palestine (<https://visualizingpalestine.org/>)
2. Read about the work of Defense for Children International—Palestine Chapter at: (<https://www.dci-palestine.org/>).
3. You can also read a few first-person stories about life in Gaza by young writers at We are Not Numbers (<https://wearenotnumbers.org/>).
4. Resources for bringing Palestine into the classroom in all grades are available at: <https://idainthemiddle.com/teaching-resources/>

“Only love is our guiding light. Only love can heal and unite. Every deed of goodness leads the way to peace.”

—Amma

Shine on Brightly

My sister and I were raised by parents who placed high value on seeking and creating intentional communities. We spent our childhoods surrounded by a diverse group of individuals—healers, political organizers, artists, musicians and people of various faiths and belief systems—all brought together through their desire for peace and community. This unique group of community leaders and activists worked to promote the health and well being of our community—local and global—and also served as excellent mentors for my sister and I.

I have dedicated 23 years of my professional life to serving my community: first as a social service specialist in child abuse and trauma, and later as a pediatric nurse. My personal passion in life has always been children—they are the most pure and beautiful light in this world.

On October 7, that light was greatly dimmed. First, by the shockingly brutal attack on Israel by Hamas (resulting in the largest number of Jews killed since the Holocaust)... followed by the deadliest siege on and displacement of Palestinians since their 1948 *Nakba* (*literal meaning is “catastrophe” in Arabic and refers to the dispossession and displacement of the Palestinian people*).

In light of this incredibly divisive and devastating humanitarian crisis, I believe it is imperative (to both local and world peace) that we continue to hold space for *both* our Jewish and Islamic friends. We must prioritize respecting and acknowledging each other's suffering and how the experience of violence and trauma influences how we view the world. As a global community we need to recognize that we are ALL deserving of peace, respect and the meeting of our most basic and universal human needs.

Engaging in hateful or racist speech or the spread of misinformation puts actual human lives at risk. Both anti-semitism and Islamophobia are steadily on the rise. Any enduring world peace will only be achieved when we intentionally and repeatedly engage in difficult yet peaceful dialogue, all the while facing our own personal biases, confronting generational trauma and focusing on our shared human experience.

I am committed to being the voice for change I want to see, not just locally but also internationally. I want the world to be a safe and inclusive space for all children so that their special light continues to shine on brightly.

—Hannah Mathson, Registered Nurse, Oregon.

House of Hope Vision School, Palestine

“What unites us is our unique humanity, that diversity is what it's all about. Maybe our identities are different, and our cultures are so different, but what unites us is one humanity for all dignity, for all, and equality for all.

I was born in Jerusalem. I'm the co-founder of House of Hope Vision School and Kindergarten, and I lived all my life under the Israeli military occupation with one dream that tomorrow will be better than yesterday, with one dream: changing my community. I try to transform my internal anger into a creative demonstration of non-violence and resistance through good education, art therapy, and dynamic activities that will shape the imagination—the imagination of our kids and youh—to dream, draw, play, sing, dance, and to act. They are the future of the Palestinian state.

We will never lose hope in our humanity. House of Hope, is a place for post-trauma healing. It's a place for non-violence, communication, education. In our school the third and fourth-grades' Peace and Justice Education class, we learn essential concepts, protests, demonstrations, and even how to express free speech. We remember Martin Luther King Jr.'s “I Have a Dream” speech, and we too, have a lot of dreams.

We are sad that we are going through a difficult war where a lot of innocent people have been killed by both nations. We dream of a two-state solution with dignity, prosperity, equality, and freedom of movement. That is what the Palestinians are dreaming of for the last 70 years.

We hope for a future which is better for building communities; where Jews, Christians, Muslims, and all nations will live as One—live under one sky, where reconciliation and love overcome our fears, doubts, and anger. We invite you to be a part of our vision and our mission of putting love into action. Love heals the anger and creates possibilities for change, peace, and justice—one justice for all and one love for all. *Salaam*,

This message was shared by Milad Vosgueritchian, director, House of Hope Vision School, Palestine. Visit: <https://houseofhope.vision> for information about them.