

Nonviolence as a Legitimate Means toward Peace in Palestine

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*Nations that use armed struggles inherit dictatorships.
Nations that use nonviolence inherit democracy.*

I am encouraged that at the worst time of being under military brutal occupation of the Israelis, the thing which keeps the Palestinian going is the spirit of resistance, the overwhelming spirit of endurance. Even though the world heard the Palestinians, the pain and sorrow they receive every day on the hands of Jews and Israelis is a tremendous price they and their children are paying just being Palestinians and being born Christians and Moslems. Palestinians want the world to see their joy. Nonviolent action has not been a casualty of the conflict but is becoming stronger, spreading to towns, refugee camps and villages throughout the entire region. Nonviolence struggle is also becoming the talk of the Palestinian Authority—even the President himself.

Nonviolence Defined

The term nonviolence has been used in many ways. It has been used to describe pacifism, a lifestyle, a set of beliefs, an instrument of power and a strategy for liberation, and a method of achieving economic empowerment. *Our discussion refers to nonviolence as a means of affecting lasting change and resolving conflict.* Nonviolence motivates people to act justly and ethically and to demand just and ethical action, particularly by those in power, without resort to physical harm. The first premise of nonviolence is never to participate in anything that is immoral, and to speak truth to those who would wield power.

Plato sets forth this principle in the book “Republic”, as exemplified by Socrates refusing to take part in unjust action. There is an injunction to act morally and to not be silent in the face of injustice. Yet, each of us must develop our own morality from within, though each owes a duty to assist others and the community at large in the development of a collective reality by sharing and by dialoguing about their own views.

Nonviolence is action based upon principle that is undertaken in a tactical way so as to make the moral point effectively. It is not based on religion, yet requires a religious zeal and self-discipline to be successful. Also, many have been attracted to nonviolence in the name of religion. For example, consider the Quakers, Mennonite and Brethren churches, as well as Sufism in Islam.

Nonviolence as proposed by Henry Thoreau, Ralph Waldo Emerson and used by Mahatma Gandhi interprets the above to mean that violence is always wrong and should never be undertaken for any purpose. Just what constitutes violence is a complex question. Clearly killing people or inflicting serious injury is violent. Other physical, social, political, economic or psychological actions may also be deemed violent, depending upon their intent and effect.

The ultimate aim of nonviolence is to achieve justice and moral interaction among people without doing violence. Ideally, all human interactions should be built upon a basis of mutual respect and understanding in which all parties see themselves as members of a community soul or mind, regardless of whether they are members of the exact same community as defined in the usual political and sociological sense.

Principles and Practices

The relationship between principle and the practice of nonviolent action is always intended to have an effect. Occasionally, the action itself may directly or indirectly cause the desired end as when a demonstration convinces Israeli political leaders to change their course of action. Most often nonviolent action is a catalyst in building moral and political support for changing social and political policy. Socrates made his moral point effectively by his willingness to die for his principles. Gandhi's march to the sea to attempt to peacefully take over the salt monopoly of the British signaled the ultimate end of the British occupation of India.

Tactically nonviolent action is often provocative. It will put the Israeli military in a double bind. If the nonviolent act is allowed, it makes its point and the movement gains strength. If the Israelis resist, particularly where they resort to violent means, the relative justice of the actors and injustice of their opponents is magnified, bringing considerable political gain to the activists.

Many factors are involved in the effect of any action, but perhaps the biggest factor is how open Palestinians are to a particular action and to the general principle or movement to which it relates. How will an action be perceived? One needs to consider carefully where Palestinian people are now and what affect a given course of action may have. From that essential standpoint, it is not enough just to act on principle. The greatest concern is the long run, and what impact an act may eventually have in moving consciousness forward.

Lessons from Palestine

The history of nonviolence in Palestine has yielded seven principles of nonviolent struggle:

1. *An education process* of nonviolent methods in the life history of Palestinians, Moslems and Arabs in general *is needed* to bring attention to the history of nonviolence, such as the six month strike in 1936 that even Gandhi spoke about. In the Egyptian nonviolent quick response of getting rid of their monarchy (King Farouq), not a single Egyptian died. Abdul Gaffar Khan, a Moslem from the Pathan province in India, joined Gandhi believing that Islam is a nonviolent religion, and he wanted all the Moslems to join the Gandhi movement. His life story was translated into Arabic and distributed in Palestine and the Arab and Moslem world.

2. Nonviolent methods and practice are *not an imported concept* from the West or the East. Its use is practical for every one and each person who is willing to work for justice without the use of arms or any means of killing.

3. *Symbolic forms of nonviolent protests such as vigils, marches, and flying of the Palestinian*

flags are important.

4. *The ideas of this movement must be brought to Palestinians in every village and every refugee camp.* Young people should have a choice to make nonviolence part of their strategy and part of their operation. There should be seminars for the leadership of the PLO and continuous correspondence of certain methods that can be implemented to reach peace.

5. *Non-cooperation must be employed,* including social boycotts, economic boycotts, labor strikes, and many forms of political non-cooperation, ranging from civil disobedience and refusal to pay taxes to campaigns to eat Palestinian products and use Palestinian goods, even cigarettes.

6. *Contact must be made with Israeli groups* who are interested in peace. Partnerships should be formed with them so that both sides can see the humanity and fear of the other as well as the suffering.

7. *Nonviolent intervention should be used* ranging from hunger strikes to the establishment of self-reliant institutions, nonviolent occupations and blockades, and the establishment of a rival parallel government. In the first Intifada Palestinians, without the Palestinian Authority or any government, established NGO committees that took care of most of the needs of people with joy and a feeling that each person has to meet their responsibility in order for each community to take care of its own needs.

Success of Nonviolence

Nonviolent strategy has a long history with varying degrees of success. Success sometimes has come through changing the minds and attitudes of the opponents, but that is rare. More often partial success has been achieved through accommodation (gaining and giving up part of one's objectives.) The Oslo accord is a good example of this, also if we look at most labor strikes. Nonviolent strategy has also demonstrated its capacity to produce nonviolent coercion of the opponent so that no alternative remains but to capitulate. At times, the opponent's regime is even disintegrated in face of massive repudiation and paralyzing non-cooperation as was the case in the "Animal March". *

Nonviolence strategy has been waged in recent years in many parts of the world, including Mexico, Chile, Korea, South Africa, Palestine, Israel, Sudan, and various parts of the former Soviet Union, Poland, Hungary, Burma, Brazil, and China. Historically, nonviolent strategy has wielded significant power in conflicts when applied skillfully and has often been met with serious repression by the opponents. That response is recognition of its power. In fact, the brutalities of repression against nonviolent resisters trigger a process of "political jiu-jitsu" which increases the resistance, sows problems in the opponents' own camp, and mobilizes third parties in favor of the nonviolent resisters.

This, by itself, was my point for a long time, i.e. that *a strategy of nonviolence needs to be endorsed from top to bottom.* If the Palestinian President endorses nonviolence, all Fateh groups will follow. We can accomplish a great deal by our full, unrelenting commitment.

Basic Tenets

There are other tenets we must embrace.

1. We *must support the Palestinian people to continue the struggle to get rid of the occupation* because no people should be under another people's control. Even as high as the price of freedom can be—economically, physically, psychologically—we as Palestinian should continue to fight the Israeli occupation and not let the Iraq issue take a priority in our struggle. We should condemn the occupation of Iraq and show the Iraqis the power of nonviolence that we are engaged in.
2. We need to *increase the number of delegations*. First, a delegation with noteworthy people like Mandela and Jimmy Carter, or 5 or 10 Nobel Peace Prize laureates, to meet with Palestinians and with Israelis together to promote peace rather than prolongation of the conflict and to bring the conflict back to the media's attention. Second, a delegation of seasoned nonviolent activists to meet with elected Palestinian Authority figures to promote the use of nonviolence as part of the struggle from both sides—from the top and from the bottom. Third, a broad based delegation to meet with Palestinians to tell us we are not forgotten, that people around the world stand with us, even those in Australia. We need to combat our feelings of hopelessness. This third delegation would meet with people in the refugee camps, business people, professors and workers.
3. We need to work on the *media and public relations*. At this time the Israelis are able to control and blackout information. We need to suggest and request that Arab leaders regularly visit U.S., European and other international political leaders, officially and unofficially. But they should coordinate with us.
4. We need to have the *church leadership once again assume the moral responsibility* of communicating to their congregations about what's happening to the Palestinians that we are paying the price for their own bad deeds against the Jews. We have been doing it for more than fifty years and we will suffer more for you, just don't forsake us.
5. We need *action on several levels*, on the international level, on the Palestinian and on the Israeli-Palestinian level. For example, let's have a monthly march to demand that the Israelis lift one blockade any place, then have a march of victory that they did it.
6. We need to *eliminate the divisions within the Palestinians*. We have divisions between Palestinians who came from Tunis, those inside the 1967 line, Palestinians who are in refugee camps as well those who are in Gaza. We do not need the Israelis to dictate to us who we are.
7. We have to *stop the divisions between the Arab world and Palestinians* and keep uppermost in our minds that the biggest division is between the Israeli and Palestinian peoples.
8. We need to have *local town meetings for Palestinians* to express themselves and choose the

kind of struggle they want and to discuss the consequences of that struggle, and their expectations of the outcome of the struggle, to define their goals and objectives. It seems that there is no leadership to lead the Palestinians into thoughtful decision-making. Unfortunately, it seems this goes for the Palestinian Authority, as well.

9. *We need funds*; nonviolence can't continue to be the activity of the poor. To make changes in lives of people and bring a just peace funds have to be given in significant amounts to make a difference. If we had had funds in the first Intifada, to implement all our strategies, we would have had a normal peace between us and the Israelis long before this time.

What If?

We all have different approaches as human beings about how to resolve the problems we face. Some of them can be unique. Let me give some ideas that can change the thinking on the power of nonviolence. For example:

- *All Palestinians Arabs Christians and Moslems become Jews* so that the law of return will apply to us. No longer will we live in fear of being killed, or our houses demolished, or our land confiscated, or having checkpoints, We will all become chosen people just like the Jews. This will confuse and destabilize the Israeli society, and they will not know what to do. I tried that and letters were sent to more than 250 rabbis from different Jewish organization, telling them if I approached them to refuse me.
- *For the refugees*, we cannot wait for another fifty years and endure the suffering and degradation. *Let us burn all our belongings and commit ourselves to walk to the river Jordan, not looking back until we cross to the Promised Land which is ours.* Thousands and hundred of thousands of Palestinians from Jordan, Lebanon and Syria will be supported by Palestinians inside Israel as well as the Palestinians in other countries. Palestinian families with homes and resources will adopt an entire family to help them survive and regain control of their lives. This is a huge commitment that needs a strategy, divide the miles of the Jordan River to many sectors and have sponsorship from churches, countries and individuals. (Can we count on the churches, or this will be another betrayal?)
- *We need a declaration that from this day on we as Palestinians will commit ourselves to nonviolent methods* in all and every activity we do and we will not carry any gun not even to defend ourselves. (That will stop the wall)
- *Members of the Palestinian Authority should resign*, all of them, and give everything back to the Israelis. The occupying force will have to pay for our schools, hospitals and civil service jobs. The Israeli needs to pay and know that to occupy people it costs money, a lot of money. We will not lose, and it will make things very simple. An authority without authority is like a heavenly dream.

- If we want to use nonviolence and commit ourselves to it, *we need the support of all Arabs*. We need to export this commitment to the whole Arab masses and bring change in the Arab régime, everywhere.
- The Arab world and its leaders should realize how much of an influence and impact they could have on the Palestinian struggle. *It is in the best interest of the Arabs to create flexible funding mechanisms*. Funds could be used to wage a massive media campaign locally, within Israel and Palestine, regionally and internationally. The campaign could highlight the life struggles of ordinary Palestinians and illustrate the relationships that can and must be forged between Israelis and Palestinians so that neither would have to once again mourn another son, a daughter, a brother, a sister, a father, or a mother lost to violence. Areas in Palestine that are the most affected should be the focal point for media campaigns.
- Another aspect of this campaign is for Palestinians to *host more international conferences* that welcome women, various religious organizations, academics, and students from across the globe. The relationships that would be formed would reach out across oceans and lands. This would create waves of support for the Palestinians suffering and struggling on the ground. These international guests can also act as international observers as they see and hear for themselves, the life experiences of the Palestinians without the distortion of media censors. These people-to-people networks will unite us in peace and forge a psychological, political, and spiritual bond that no bullet, missile, bomb, or stone can replace.
- *This Palestinian struggle is an Arab struggle, so let us not make it a Moslem struggle.*
- The Palestinians should call for an *"International Day of Solidarity"* every Monday of each month with supporters fasting one meal that day and contributing the cost of the meal to the cause. Places of worship would organize prayers on this day for the Palestinians. Teach-ins would be organized on campuses in the region and internationally.
- This struggle should also be *the people's choice*. The leaders in the legislature and Palestinian community should embrace this nonviolent campaign. This effort would encourage the Palestinian leaders to produce a "Declaration" of what they want and desire.
- *The support of the civil society organizations* at this juncture is of utmost importance. Local and international NGOs should continue their struggle to promote nonviolent means of bringing in a real change in life and society for Palestinians and Israelis. This would mean that the various NGOs must also act morally and ethically.
- NGOs supporting the Palestinian struggle have confronted Israelis for the injustices done against the Palestinians. However, when Palestinians against other Palestinians inflict violence, they have remained quiet. For the sake of justice, NGOs cannot afford to be selective. *Injustice is injustice no matter who the perpetrator is.*

Nonviolence Increasing

Nonviolence activities have been on the rise in the recent months. In recent weeks Palestinians and supporters of their struggle, locally and internationally, have protested, wanting their voices to be heard in a nonviolent way

These efforts could be complemented beautifully when *open communication between Israeli and the Palestinian* is established. This is where real leadership begins. The Palestinian must take the lead in opening channels of communication with the Israeli. The Palestinian should then welcome Israelis who are speaking against and are calling for the end of the occupation. Trust building is of utmost importance here. Palestinians must take the chance to build trust. To succeed, Israel must reciprocate with good will.

Great satisfaction was evident among the Palestinians people when elections took place to elect the Palestinian legislature and president. However, the rejoicing was short lived when the re-election dates passed by and the people lost their opportunity to participate in a democratic practice that makes a nation strong. *Elections are sacred and so are election dates.* The government should not make excuses to avoid these historic moments in time. These acts of avoidance are a betrayal from the Palestinian leadership. Because it is of our making, the trust of those in office is gone and again we lost the confidence of a leadership that working for the common good, but it started to look as they are working for their own good. Shame on them and sad movement in our struggle that destroyed our pride and the effort to work to end occupation and to put it in such hands is not worth the effort.

Elected officials and election organizers must *respect the outcomes of elections.* Even though they as individuals might have different viewpoints or preferences, elections should be sacred. Palestinian elections should also be free of pressure from the U.S. and Israel. This means that tremendous trust should be given to the process. The process will bring about what people really and truly want.

We recognize that many people have given or lost their lives in this long struggle. We are confident that they are not wasted. Unlike the first Intifadah, these lost lives have pushed the PLO into the occupied territories. The second Intifadah opens the door to the establishment of an independent Palestinian State. But now, as we continue, this Intifadah must be nonviolent. A moratorium on violence must be accepted and embraced by all parties involved.

The Future

As we look ahead, Israel should realize that there would be *no real peace without Palestinian rights.* For Israel to live in peace with the Arab world they must commit to the rights of Palestinians being respected and consistently implemented. We do feel that this land should not be treated by one group as if it is a gift from God to them and only them. Until the greatest majority of the Israeli public recognize and accept the rights of Palestinians to live in their home land as equals, there will be no final solution to this conflict.

We should realize that our struggle is not the only struggle. Some struggles have used arms and violence, and some have been nonviolent in nature. As we look at history for guidance, we can learn from the tremendous successes of nonviolent struggles. There are many more events in history that have used nonviolence as a legitimate means to alter the relations of power. We as Palestinians would be proud to count ourselves as the next victors of a nonviolent struggle. We want peace and want our children to have a better life and a peaceful world; we must rise beyond hatred, fear or religious fundamentalism. *We need not wait for the other side to stretch out their hand to us. We can create our future and make a new beginning. It can be done and let us do it together.*

* The Animal March occurred when the Israelis took more than a hundred animals from the Bethlehem area that they said they had been grazing on military land. It seemed not the first time. So the shepherds came to me and asked me if I could help them bring back their goats, donkeys, sheep and camels. They were afraid that the animals would die or be harmed or sold. I went to some Israeli friends and told them that this is not acceptable and that I wanted to go the Israeli Police to ask for permission to get a license for an animal march in Jerusalem. I submitted the permit application at the Police Station, and they were supposed to give me an answer within seven days. In the meantime I put an ad in the newspaper and started advertising that we will have an animal march. I asked shopkeepers not to leave greens or flowers on the side street where we would be marching. This idea got the attention of many Jews, and they called the police. Every one supported the animals more than the human rights of the Palestinians. Before the time for the march, all the animals were released. So we dropped the march. This is the fun I want people to have in using nonviolence.

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