

## *Nonviolence as a Strategy for Struggle and Method for Peace-Making*

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Allow me to share with you the following story entitled *The Smarting Dervish*

A dervish was sitting peacefully by a river,  
when a passerby saw the bare back of his  
neck and yielded to the temptation to  
give it a resounding whack. He was full  
of wonder at the sound his hand had made on  
the fleshy neck, but the dervish,  
smarting with pain,  
got up to hit him back.

“Wait a minute,” said the aggressor.  
“You can hit me if you wish.  
But first answer this question:  
Was the sound of  
the whack produced by my hand or by the  
back of your neck?”

Said the dervish, “Answer that yourself.  
My pain won’t allow me to theorize. You  
can afford to do so, because you don’t feel  
<sup>[1]</sup>what I feel.”

It seems that we are the Smarting Dervishes. We have no time to theorize since we are trying to survive and always should be on the alert. Yet, I highly appreciate the invitation to give a paper so I have time to reflect. As much as there should be time for action, there should be time for reflection.

Many Palestinians have conducted a nonviolent campaign against the Israeli occupation, on the personal, NGO, political party, community, and country levels. According to Gene Sharp, the director of the program on nonviolent sanctions at Harvard University's Center for International Affairs, there are three classes of methods in conducting nonviolence:

- 1) Symbolic forms of nonviolent protest,
- 2) Non cooperation,
- 3) Intervention<sup>[2]</sup>

Palestinian Non-violence drew on the first two methods and on the third through international diplomacy, governmental as well as citizen’s diplomacy.

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<sup>[1]</sup> Anthony De Mello, “The Song of The Bird,” Image Books, Double Day 1982, page 35

<sup>[2]</sup> Gene Sharp, “The Intifada and Nonviolent Struggle,” Journal of Palestine Studies 73 (autumn 1989), p4

There are two major aspects of nonviolence in the Palestinian struggle. First, there is the nonviolence of the Palestinians in Occupied Palestine and Diaspora, and second, there is the political route and the diplomatic channels. Nonviolence is a commonly misunderstood term. By nonviolence, I do not mean passiveness, weakness, or surrender. Rather, it is an empowerment and an ongoing struggle that requires inner strength and perseverance.

The call for the third way of resistance has lots of support from political parties, religious leaders, students circles, trade unions, Bar association and different guilds..to name a few.. Fatah Movement Sixth conference as the mainstream of the PLO called for enhancing the struggle of Non Violence. Kairos Document, a moment of truth which is endorsed and signed by lay and religious Christian leaders of the Palestinian people call for Nonviolence. In my view, it is the most effective way of ending the occupation

I can summarize my bias to non-violence in the following points:

**First**, as a Palestinian, I believe violence dehumanizes human beings. Therefore, through nonviolent struggle, we find the common ground among Judaism, Christianity, and Islam in their belief that human beings are created in the image of God. . Definitely I agree with George Bernard Shaw : “This is the true joy in life: Being used for a purpose recognized by yourself as a mighty one, and being a force of nature instead of a feverish, selfish little clod of ailments and grievances, complaining the world will not devote itself to making you happy. I am of the opinion that my life belongs to the whole community, and as long as I live, it is a privilege to do for it whatever I can. I want to be thoroughly used up when I die; for the harder I work, the more I live. I rejoice in life for its own sake. Life is no ‘brief candle’ for me. It is a sort of splendid torch which I have got hold of for the moment, and I want to make it burn as brightly as possible before handing it to future generations.”

There are currently four types of violence influencing the lives of the peoples of this land. The most talked about is insurgent violence, carried out by nationalists and others who have opted to revolt against the occupation, siege, and oppression inflicted upon them (for more than 62 years).

But the Israeli government and settlers are carrying out the other three forms of violence against the Palestinians. Structural violence, environmental violence, and state sponsored violence are all part of the system being used to continue to subjugate the Palestinians to the de facto apartheid that is currently in place.

**Second**, through nonviolence we don’t only seek the liberation of our nation, but also seek the liberation of our enemy by alleviating Israeli fears of an inevitable Palestinian state. As the educator Paulo Freire says, "Only power that springs from the oppressed will be sufficiently strong to free both" <sup>[3]</sup>

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<sup>[3]</sup> Gene Sharp, "The Intifada and Nonviolent Struggle," Journal of Palestine Studies 73 (autumn 1989), p.4

When we consider the dehumanizing acts the Israeli government has asked its army to perform, such as beating, maiming, killing, terrorizing, and torturing—we must think of the repercussions these sanctioned will have on the future of Israeli society. What kind of citizens will this generation of soldiers make? And, if this policy continues, how many subsequent generations will learn to be racist and to deal with fear and anger through violence?

We are like sitting ducks in a shooting gallery. I can't agree less but affirm what the Dutch Father Henri Nouwen, says, "our great task is to prevent our fears from boxing our fellow human beings into characterizations and to see them as persons."

**Third**, given Israel's nuclear arsenal, at least 300 nuclear heads and very complicated defense strategy, there is little hope of defeating Israel by war. The second Intifada shows the futility of using arms, especially when the Israeli reaction is more brutal and in damaging fashion. But, with the Palestinian commitment to non-violent struggle, there is no way that Israel can maintain the status quo and obliterate the Palestinian national identity. Israelis must eventually accept the inevitability of change. Nonviolence should address these facts in order to pave the way of coexistence whether in a two-state solution or a bi-national democratic state. Let me draw your attention to the appeal signed by 70 Palestinian intellectuals and officials that published in the local Palestinian newspaper, Al-Ayyam which calls upon our people to take the initiative and rise again in a wide ranging peaceful and popular intifadah with clear aims and sound speech. Such initiatives are up-swinging, adopted and acted upon by many persons, NGOS and some political parties.

**Fourth**, through the 1<sup>st</sup> Uprising non-violence has so far achieved what violence has not been able to achieve. Palestinians have gained world sympathy for their cause, recognition that occupation is no longer viable, and affirmation from more than one hundred nation-states recognizing the right of Palestinians to have their own state. Some might argue that the armed struggle of the first decade (1964-1974) of the Palestinian revolution has put the Palestinians on the world map. One cannot deny that historical background, but being on the world political map is not enough. We need to foster our existence on the geographical map. Does the second Intifada echos the gains of the 1<sup>st</sup> Intifada is the question that poses itself persistently.

**Fifth**, we see ourselves as members of the world community and are aware of the international impact of the Israel-Palestine conflict. We also realize the need for international support. Opting for non-violence requires the support of others across the world to exert pressure to fulfill our aims. This would complement the local strategies. We need to expose the Israeli government atrocities. The World community needs to act and respond more efficiently. Indeed, the apartheid regime in South Africa wouldn't be dismantled, East Timor wouldn't have its independence, unless Collective Responsibility has been in action.

**“It is impossible to create a healthy culture if we refuse to meet, and if we refuse to listen. But if we meet, and when we listen, we reweave the world into wholeness. And holiness.”**

**-- Margaret Wheatly**

*Turning to One Another: Simple Conversations to Restore Hope to the Future*  
Berrett-Koehler Publishers, San Francisco, 2002  
<http://turningtooneanother.net/>

**Sixth**, based on the experience of previous and present popular struggles, I believe that nonviolence will foster our relations with peace-loving people who can be mobilized to support the unarmed oppressed in the light of the atrocities and brutalities of the oppressor. This simply illustrates our vision of a new world order based on peace, economic growth, social justice and ecological balance. Although the situation of the world community is bleak, we are cautiously hopeful! “We have an incurable malady called hope!”

**Seventh**, nonviolent strategy can help us address Israeli society by working with those who cannot tolerate the unjust acts of their government. Hundreds of signatories are already on the Ometz Lesarev (Courage to refuse) declaration. There are different groups who reactivate themselves, like IDF widows, Yesh Gvul, Gush Shalom, the Israeli committee against House Demolitions, Ta'yush and others. Along that line I encourage all of you to join the Appeal from Nobel Laureate Mairead Maguire to free Mordechai Vannunu dated July 14, 2010.

According to a brochure circulated in North America by the Refuser Solidarity Network that there are more than 1200 objectors including 27 Israeli air force pilots and 13 reservists in the Sayeret Matkal Commando Unit.

Let me salute the five young men namely Noam Bahat, Adam Maor, Haggai Matar, Matan Kaminer and Shimr Zameret who have refused to take part in military action in the Occupied Territories. As a matter of fact in January 2004, they were sentenced to one year in prison in addition to the year they already spent. There was more dissatisfaction of the Israeli society over the attack on Lebanon.

Palestinians can raise the awareness of Israelis and break down stereotypes, but only Israelis themselves can change the policy of their government. Therefore, I agree with Amos Givrtz, an Israeli peace activist that Israeli people are advised to be more active in preventive non-violence. In the midst of rising extremism among the Israeli right wing, Israeli peace activists need to be more affirmative and assertive in their struggle to get them rid of being occupiers. Because of the Palestinians' unique position, they are able to liberate Israeli society from learning to dehumanize, abuse, and degrade itself.

**Eighth**, we should not be dragged into the swamp of violence into which Israel is trying to put us in. As Nelson Mandela put it: “It is always the oppressor, not the oppressed who

dictates the form of struggle". Despite the fact, Palestinians should heed the words of Napoleon: "Never do what your enemy wants you to do, if only because he wants you to do it". Through its daily provocations Israel tries to push us to use greater violence, precisely because the Israeli government is well equipped to deal with violence. It seems that Israeli government is threatened more by thoughts of peace and nonviolence than by war. Their whole system is trained for war; it is not well equipped to face peace.

The strategy of working for peace should replace once and for all the strategy of waging war. Yes, we opt for non-violence. Nevertheless let me share with you some of the challenges that might impede our march towards non- violence:

***How can people en mass be convinced to adopt non-violence as a way of life and a strategy taking into consideration:***

- 1. the intransigence of the Israeli Government***
- 2. The appalling imbalance of Power***
- 3. The media bias to Israel on a larger scale.***
- 4. The lack of direction and determination of the Arab and Moslem Governments and societies***
- 5. And on the top of that the politics of the Western governments in general and the US in particular which speak and act in favor of Israeli's stories and still suffer from the guilt feeling.***
- 6. Hezbollah's resistance which has sped up the Israeli withdrawal from South Lebanon as it is widely believed. Needless to mention the last round of battles between Hezbollah and Israel that has impacted the mentality of people here that Israel will not voluntary withdraw from the occupied territories.***
- 7. The last elections in the Palestinian territories and the coup in Gaza where President Abbas and Hamas-controlled government sharing the power with two different programs and policies***

**Allow me to point out more challenges that we face on the World,s level which have weakened our position visa a vis the non-violent strategy:**

1. The marginalization and alienation of UN bodies as a better broker and more objective mediator. Furthermore, Europe and Russia still weak in creating a more understanding effective policy in the Middle East. Will the Quartet work together at any time to be effective?

2. How to strengthen the Global Networking for fighting against injustice. The challenge is how to build globalization at the grassroots level since, "Any injustice anywhere is injustice everywhere". Would the striving forces for change, peace, justice and transformation be able to empower each other and work together and ultimately to be the parallel emerging power to multinational corporations and Capitalism.

3. We are not expecting or even asking the world to bring Israel to its knees, even we find no sincere efforts to bring Israeli government to its senses. Therefore we are for Boycotting anything produces in the Israeli settlements, divest from any business, activity that prolong and strengthen the occupation as well as to impose sanctions on Israel to succumb to the international agreements. Precisely we are calling all of the parties concerned to move from blaming , pointing the finger, dwelling on victimhood ,or and feeling guilty to assume collective responsibility . Also we need to empower the weak indifferent ways and mainly by bringing more investment on different levels and in different fields.

We need a jump-start to move away from the deadlock of the peace process. This requires three dimensions of joint non-violence struggle: the Palestinians should continue their proactive struggle to get rid of the Israeli occupation (e. g. nonviolent protests, weekly demonstrations at different pockets of non-violence in the West Bank, vigils, training workshops, networking with other peaceful organization etc.; the Israelis need to affirm and enhance their preventive struggle to rid themselves of being occupiers; the third party and pro-justice groups are required to raise the awareness among the constituencies to have leverage on the power to be to succumb to the international will of resolving conflicts through the channels of government, citizens diplomacy and UN resolutions.

**Therefore** An honest broker, objective arbitrator, an even handed mediator- A third party is essential. The West is still a hostage of being guilty. Therefore perpetuating the Israeli victimhood mentality and enhancing the guilt feeling of the West are very dubious approaches to silence any prophetic voices and actions against the Israeli occupation. Will the West ever be liberated from such manipulative burdens? We believe the Quartet (Russia, USA, EU and UN) could be and should be the 3<sup>rd</sup> party and we hope they will be active, responsible and impartial. Is it too much we are asking?

Let us not postpone the inevitable. I strongly believe that war, violence and negative diplomacy are combinations of arts and actions that delay the inevitable. Inevitability says that we can live together either in a two-state solution or one bi-national democratic state. This could be a model solution that renders justice, restores hope, alleviates fear, heals trauma, and increases potency for co-existence and economic growth. This inevitability will not occur without radical changes from within our societies and a resounding wake-up call.