

CORNERSTONE

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The Ongoing Nakba

Photo by Jay Gregory



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"Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, making the most of the time, because the days are evil. So do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is." (Ephesians 5: 15-17)

When reviewing the history of the Israel-Palestine conflict from the 19th century to the establishment of the state of Israel in the mid 20th century, it is possible to point out at least seven major historical developments that directly or indirectly contributed eventually to the Palestinian Nakba.

To help the reader understand this background, it is necessary to outline these developments briefly:

First: Since the beginnings of the 19th century, one can

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point to the development of what became known as pre-millennial dispensationalism among certain Evangelical and Protestant groups in Western Europe, especially in Britain and later in the United States. This teaching emphasized the centrality of the Jewish people in God's plan of history, their essential return to Palestine in fulfillment of biblical prophecy, and the re-establishment of their ancient kingdom as a prelude to the Second Coming of Christ, the great battle of Armageddon, the final defeat of evil, the end of the world, and the creation of a new heaven and a new earth.

Second, the emergence of the Zionist Movement in Europe at the end of the 19th century seeking a safe haven for Jews who have suffered long as minorities living among eastern and western European Christians. The Zionist Movement visualized the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine and its vicinity in the spirit of

colonialism and imperialism of the time.

Third, the next significant development was the acceptance of the British government to adopt and sponsor the Zionist project in what we know as the Balfour Declaration of 1917 just before the end of WWI. After the war, Britain assumed the mandate over Palestine and began to help the Zionists realize their dream in Palestine.

Fourth, the Balfour Declaration gave a great boost to the Zionist Movement. The latter intensified its activities among Jewish communities everywhere and cultivated important links among influential people including high level state officials and top government leaders in various countries especially in Europe and the United States.

Fifth, the tragedy of the Holocaust during WWII and the suffering of millions of Jews under the Nazis sharpened the Jewish problem and called attention to the plight of

European Jewry. It won them tremendous sympathy, and the urgency of finding a viable solution.

Sixth, the success of the Zionist Movement through its influential friends around the world and especially those in the United States in passing the Partition Plan of Palestine in November 1947 through the United Nations General Assembly that gave over 55% of the land of Palestine to the Jewish state when Jews, legally, owned less than 7% of it.

Seventh, the Zionists executed their plan of establishing the state of Israel, and through military force were able to ethnically cleanse 78% of the land of Palestine of its Palestinian people and to demolish over 500 of their villages and towns.

These seven factors are crucial to understanding the background to the Palestinian Nakba. One cannot, however, gloss over the weakness of Arab and Palestinian leaders at the time, their ineffective diplomacy (even collusion with Zionist leaders), their lack of sound planning, and their deficient organization. By and large, they underestimated the military training and power of the Zionists as well as their influential contacts abroad that protected and supported the actions of the nascent state.

When we look at the last 60 years, it is clear to many people that neither the Palestinians nor the Arab countries, nor the international community through the UN have been able to bring an end to the tragedy of Palestine. No just resolution of the conflict has been implemented. In fact, the political situation has deteriorated since the

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occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip in June 1967. Since then, the state of Israel has grown economically and militarily in leaps and bounds and its military grip over the remaining Palestinian land and population has become firmer and harsher. In other words, the Palestinian Nakba has not only continued, it has worsened.

While the government of Israel has successfully linked itself with the United States, the strongest military and economic power in the world today, the Palestinians have not enjoyed such powerful allies to protect them and plead their just case. Instead of realizing that no real justice will ever come from the US because of its

unwavering commitment to Israel, the Palestinian Authority in its desperation and frustration, has continued to cling solely to the US administration.

In a unipolar world, justice is not always defined in accordance with the principles of international law but according to the interests of the major power and its allies. In such a context, Israel has enjoyed a free rein. To a large extent, it has been free to do what it wants against the Palestinians and to dictate what it wills to them all in contravention of the decisions of the international community and with no power to restrain it.

It is important to remember that when the United Nations partitioned

Palestine and legitimized the creation of Israel in 1947, the Zionist forces immediately began to ethnically cleanse their designated area of Palestine. In fact, in their cleansing sweep, they were de-populating the area of the Palestinian state as well. The UN ordered the Zionists to re-track and allow the repatriation of the refugees. Israel, even when still in its infancy, flouted UN resolutions. It never allowed the return of the refugees nor did it pull back to its own designated area of Palestine.

The failure of the international community to be firm in the face of Israel's intransigence has become a repeated scenario. The United States and its allies have glossed over Israeli unjust practices and expansionist policies. To this, one can add the weakness of Palestinian and Arab leaders, their lack of vision and unity, and their inability to use their powerful resources to pressure the United States to put a stop to Israeli violations of the human and political rights of the Palestinians.

In such a situation, the Palestinian Nakba is doomed to continue and worsen. Chris Hedges has aptly written, "Extremists never begin as extremists. They become extremists gradually. They move gingerly forward in an open society. They advance only so far as they fail to meet resistance. And no society is immune from this moral catastrophe" (Hedges: 2006, 152). Since 1948, Israel has been able to get by with its injustice because of the weakness of the international community (UN) that was unable or unwilling to contain its (Israel) ravenous appetite for Palestinian land and the domination of its people.

There are other factors that have contributed to the on-going Nakba. A simple outline would include the following:

1. In addition to the above mentioned factors that include the misuse of the Bible in support of Israeli claims, and the misuse of the Holocaust to instill guilt and sympathy in people, fear is a strong factor that prevents many goodhearted and knowledgeable people within the country as well as outside it, from taking a brave prophetic stand against Israeli injustice. Fear leads to silence and this allows Israel to persist in and intensify its oppression.
2. Israel has developed into a strong economic and military power and enjoys a wide business network with many countries that are unwilling to relinquish their interests for the sake of a Palestinian solution that they are not sure about.
3. The insistence on the Jewishness of the state of Israel, the demographic obsession to maintain a Jewish majority and a Palestinian minority, and the expansionist policies through settlement building are three interconnected factors that have contributed to the perpetuation of the Nakba.
4. The futility of the frustrating, tedious, and protracted negotiations between the PA and the government of Israel has led some Palestinians to opt for the use of violence as a way to achieve liberation. This vicious cycle of violence has also contributed to the ongoing Nakba.
5. The internecine strife within the

Palestinian community and especially between Fatah and Hamas and the continued internal violence has not only added to the continuing Nakba, it has created a new Nakba.

The continuing Nakba can be described by some of the words from the book of Lamentations: *“Remember, O Lord, what has befallen us; Look, and see our disgrace! Our inheritance has been turned over to strangers, our homes to aliens. We have become orphans, fatherless; our mothers are like widows. We must pay for the water we drink; the wood we get must be bought. With a yoke on our necks we are hard driven; we are weary, we are given no rest ... The joy of our hearts has ceased; our dancing has been turned to mourning.”* (Chapter 5, selected verses).

Yet in the midst of such calamity and despair, the writer of Lamentations concludes with an affirmation about the sovereignty of God, *“But you, O Lord, reign forever; your throne endures to all generations...Restore us to yourself, O Lord, that we may be restored; renew our days as of old....”*(5:19-21).

There are dark times in the history of a nation when people of faith must reaffirm their trust and hope in the living God. Such a trust and hope in God has a way of rejuvenating and energizing the community as it continues its struggle for liberation.

Many Palestinians today, Christians and Muslims, are affirming their trust and hope in the sovereignty of God who would lead them to justice and freedom.

by the Rev. Naim Ateek - director of Sabeel, Jerusalem



The Karam family

WHY DID YOU

“Why did you come back?” It’s a question people ask my wife and I when they find out that we used to live in the U.S. until we came back to live in our hometown, Nazareth. If I put a dollar into my savings account every time someone asked us this question, we would not be millionaires, but at least a \$1,000 richer. I always try to tell them in one way or another that living abroad is not



U COME BACK?

by: *Habib Karam and Gosayna Karam*

all that simple and fun. My wife Gosayna tells them that the fact we came back says something! But why did we come back?

In 1980, after I completed high school in Nazareth, I went to visit my uncles, aunt, and grandma residing in Los Angeles. I attended university there, and graduated in 1986 with a Bachelor of Science in Electrical Engineering. Soon after,

I was offered a job at Sun Microsystems in the Silicon Valley, and moved there. Living in L.A. away from home was okay; I had made some friends at the Catholic Newman Club, and I had my extended family around. However, moving to Northern California to take the job was a totally new ground for me. The family support was not there any more, and my friends were a six hour-drive away. New life, new start!

In 1979, Gosayna migrated with her family from a town just outside of Nazareth to Melbourne, Australia. That was a completely new start for them. She was just 11 years old at that time.

In 1988, I went to Nazareth for my sister's wedding. Gosayna was there at the same time visiting her relatives. We met, clicked, and had two years of a long distance relationship before we got married in 1990 in Nazareth, after which we went back to the U.S. to live there.

Gosayna began to work for HP then later worked with me at Sun Microsystems. On May 7, 1993, our first boy was born, and we named him Akram Fabian Karam. Akram was my dad's name, and usually in our culture, the oldest son's child (if it is a boy) is named after his grandfather. My parents as well as Gosayna's mom came to visit us. We baptized Akram, and they attended

my MBA graduation ceremony. Then everybody left and we felt all alone. There were no grandparents around to help and guide us to raise Akram, but we managed.

Then our lives changed on the morning of October 15, 1993 when we woke up to find that our baby left us to be with God. It was SIDS (Sudden Infant Death Syndrome). He was only 5 months old; he was full of smiles, and he was the light of our lives. We were all alone. Friends and relatives came to comfort us, but they came and went. Our parents and siblings were not with us. We felt alone and far away from home.

On August 29, 1994, Christopher John was born, and happiness returned to our lives once again. However, it was very nerve-racking when Christopher overslept in the morning and we would have to check on him. On June 20, 1997, we were blessed again with the birth of Matthew John. We were very happy with the two boys, and Gosayna decided to quit her job and stay home with the kids. It was a huge decision for us, but we both thought that it would be better for the kids, and trusted that God is always watching over us.

I changed jobs; we traveled, moved to a larger suburban house and bought newer cars. In a material

sense, life was good, but closer to heart, we always felt that we were not very happy. Sure I had a great job, and we had a “good” life but we always felt a certain emptiness because the U.S. wasn’t “Home” to us. I would come home from work at five every evening and close the door. That was the routine in our daily life.

We never felt secure about our children’s safety even though we lived in a new neighborhood. We could never let them play outside in the front yard on their own. Even at the park, we could never let them play by themselves (If you have lived in California you will know what I mean). We would buy milk from the supermarket, and on it, there would be a picture of a child saying: “Have you seen me?” These certainly did not help us to feel safe. We were living the “American Dream,” but at what cost? What is important to us? What has a higher priority?

God blessed us with a daughter, Serene Therese, on Thanksgiving Day, November 25, 1999. We were thrilled. A new baby girl was a great blessing to all of us. However, when everyone was celebrating the New Year’s, the five of us became sick and bed ridden for five days. Gosayna and I could not fully take care of the kids but we had to manage

““Why did you come back?” people ask. For love, peace and happiness! We came back to be “Home.” This is where we belong, our language, our culture and most of all our people. ””

somehow. We thought of how our parents could have come over to take care of us if we were living close to them. We would never feel so helpless to our kids. We had already been evaluating our lives, our priorities and where we wanted to live, and this experience made us consider more seriously about going “Home” to Nazareth. Despite the many good close friends we had from different nationalities and religions, we made the decision to move permanently back home in the summer of 2001. We started planning!

In the summer of 2000 we took a family trip home and looked into buying a house, signing up the kids for school and making other necessary arrangements for the move.

At Christmas of the same year, we had my parents visit and spend our last Christmas and New Year’s in the U.S. with us. As a surprise they brought my eleven year-old niece with them. When we arrived home from the airport, Christopher went

straight to his room and closed the door. When Gosayna went to check on him and asked him why he wasn’t sitting with the whole family, he explained that he hated to get attached to family because one day they will leave. So by staying away, he was protecting himself emotionally from the difficulties that accompany the “farewell.” That’s when we both realized how much our kids feel the same emptiness that we feel. The emptiness, that comes from the distance between grandparents, aunts and uncles and their grandkids, nephews and nieces. So as long as we remained in the U.S., our kids would continue to feel this emptiness rather than the love that comes from extended family.

We made the move on July 4, 2001. I was away for 21 years, and Gosayna for 22. We came home. We’re Palestinians and this is our land, we wanted to be home where we and all our ancestors grew and lived. In the U.S., we felt alone; we felt that we would lose our identity with every generation. In the U.S. we met and

interacted with second and third generation Arab Americans. Their kids would marry individuals from other nationalities and start losing their identities. They would easily forget the language and lose all connections to their ancestors' homes!

As soon as we arrived, we rented a house until we found one of our own. Matthew and Christopher started school in September of that year. They started making friends at school as well as in the neighborhood. I started my new job in August. We truly felt at "Home"- we enjoyed being close to relatives and having our kids safe. This was home in the true sense of the word. Other lands, while a great experience, were not "Home" to us.

We had made our decision and were confident in it. We sold everything and didn't look back. There were hurdles to cross and many new things to adjust to and learn, but we didn't give up. We looked at every hurdle as a learning experience and we continued. We never doubted our decision.

We made a family trip to the U.S. two years after we had been back. We had a good time, but after three weeks the kids wanted to come home! At that point we were confident that we had made the right move.

We've been back for seven years and can't imagine ever moving out of Nazareth. Gosayna and I started volunteering at different places and occasions. In addition to our work and raising our kids, we volunteer at our children's school, Sabeel, church, and other places. We always encourage people, especially school kids, to give back to the community by volunteering at local hospitals or non-profit organizations.

Our family was blessed with another daughter on May 7, 2006. Katrina was born exactly 13 years after our Heavenly Angel Akram was born. It was a true blessing from God.

Our lives are full of love. Even though we live in a land of no peace (politically), we are at Peace in our daily lives. The emptiness has gone away and our lives are full of family, neighbors and friends. We live in a big community where we share the happiness and excitement when couples get married and the sorrow when others pass away. The support available to us from our families has been tremendous. We even have time alone as a couple even with four kids.

We never interview babysitters but rather trust them. Our kids have more freedom of movement such as walking to grandma's house, going to shops, coming home from school by bus, playing in the neighborhood

with kids their age and so on. Our children have an active and safe social life; they are rarely bored! Everyone knows everyone, so it is a safe environment for our kids. Everyone looks out and supports you throughout your good and bad times.

Every country has its good and bad. For us, life can't be taken for granted. It's too short and our priority is not materialistically driven but love and family driven. We want our kids to grow up in the arms of grandparents and extended family who loves them. Special occasions such as birthdays, First Communions, Easter, and Christmas among others have taken on a new meaning. They are full of fun, happiness and love.

"Why did you come back?" people ask. For love, peace and happiness! We came back to be "Home." This is where we belong, our language, our culture and most of all our people.

Habib Karam works at a high-tech company and he is a board member of Sabeel, Nazareth. Gosayna Karam works at a non-profit organization.



THOUGHTS TO PONDER

Faith based reflections on the Nakba

by: Munir Fasbeh

What was the central message of Jesus in life? For me, it is protecting life and people from whatever and whoever harms them, tears them apart, and robs them of their worth - especially injustice and unjust rulers. His main commandment in facing such threats and in protecting and strengthening people is to love one another. His love and respect for people were at the center of his life, as exemplified in his words and actions. I will build on and get inspiration from all this, in trying to imagine what Jesus would say to us concerning the Nakba. In his words and actions, he always challenged dominant

perceptions, meanings, measures, and relationships that were tearing life apart. I will give examples of such challenges before I go on with what Jesus would say to us about the Nakba.

In Jesus' words and actions, there was a clear distinction between people and those who want to crush people. He, for example, confronted the self-righteous men by asking he who was without sin let him cast the first stone. He did not rebuke the woman; rather he confronted the men. He saw the woman and the men within the social context of their actions. He saw her as a victim, and saw them as

greedy for power and control. His compassion for people was manifested in differentiating between the woman and her actions: he was on the side of the woman, not prostitution.

Standing in front of Pilate, Jesus refused to defend himself against accusations that Pilate was accusing him of; he just kept saying 'you say so'. He refused to give legitimacy to the occupier; to military and political power - a form of resistance that is rare in history.

In the temple, he carried a whip and threw out the money lenders who

were enslaving people using economic means. He did not fight poverty and misery, but rather their causes: greed and domination. In today's world, this is equivalent to someone carrying a whip and throwing out the World Bank and its subordinates, most of which carry "national" names! Jesus would probably expect us to do the same: at least to be extremely cautious of the banks that are mushrooming in Ramallah like rabbits. It is very revealing to notice that Jesus was harsher in dealing with economic domination than with political and military ones - maybe because it is more subtle, and thus the harm is deeper and more lasting. It is also revealing to notice that he did not mention cultural domination - probably because domination was not yet perfected then as it is now. However, if Jesus were to say something to us today, in light of the cultural roots of the Nakba, he, no doubt, would say "Beware cultural domination; it is most dangerous".

When his disciples refused to be indifferent or blind to injustices that were prevalent all around them, the Pharisees from among the multitude said unto him, "Master, rebuke thy disciples." And he answered and said unto them, "I tell you that if these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out"-

something that was manifested over and over again in the case of the Palestinians: the stones cried out.

As a last example, Jesus said that if you say you love God but hate your neighbor, you are a liar. For Jesus, one's relationship to people was the

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For Jesus, one's relationship to people was the main way to measure one's love for him.

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The above can help us imagine what Jesus would say to us in relation to the Nakba. He would start by reminding us of his own story which was amazingly similar to our story (with different names): he was disinherited and a threatened subject of Roman power. The similarity between the social position of Jesus in Palestine and that of the Palestinians today in the same place is very striking. People that Jesus loved and defended were standing with their backs against the wall. Just like today, some of the walls at Jesus' time were visible; others were invisible. At the same time, he would

remind us of the similarity between then and now in terms of how people develop courage, fearlessness, and strength to live with love, dignity, creativity, and faith. I have seen this happen again and again in Palestine...

Just like what he did in the stories I mentioned above, he would start by challenging our use of the word Nakba and our perceptions and meanings of it. Jesus would not call it the Nakba. He was very careful in choosing his words. Nakba in Arabic refers - more often than not - to disasters that happen naturally without anyone planning and executing them. It is usually used in the case of natural disasters (such as an earthquake). This was not so in the case of Palestine. In 1948, things did not just happen; they did not result from a natural cause. He would see it within its historical-political-military-economic context. He would call it a foreign occupation of people's lands, destroying their homes and villages, uprooting their trees. He would call it a crime against Palestinians, planned, imposed, and executed through collaboration between the British and the Zionist organization. Its roots go back to the Sykes-Picot agreement and the Balfour Declaration and all those who gave legitimacy to the occupation of Palestine. He always addressed people in power as

hypocrites. Trusting that banks will get us out of the Nakba (as many claim today) would be considered by Jesus as a cruel joke. He would remind us that it is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye than for a rich organization to do good (enter heaven).

Similarly, he would remind us to tell UNRWA's funders that man does not live by bread alone. He would point to the new Romes - London and Washington - that were responsible for what happened in 1948 and is still happening. He would remind us of what he said 2,000 years ago: give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God - which translates in the case of Palestine in 1948, to: "Give to the British what belongs to the British and to Palestinians what belongs to Palestinians;" that is, send the British to Britain and give back Palestine to the Palestinians. This was clear even in the mandate given to Britain by the League of Nations over Palestine to help Palestinians rule themselves! Palestine was like a safe that was entrusted to Britain; a safe that was never given back to its legal owners. In practice, this means that Palestinians should ask the UN and Britain for the safe called Palestine that they never returned.

My guess is that Jesus would even go further; he would go far back to the cultural roots of what happened in 1948: Western schools which were planted in Palestine and served as tools of tearing apart Palestinian society at several levels. Cultural domination started before military and political occupation. He would remind us that the tragedy of 1948 did not start with the military

political conquest but by the conquest at the level of perceptions and conceptions. It started by tearing apart the "inner world" in each person and the social fabric in the community. That was done in the name of civilizing, educating, and converting. They even worked hard to convert the only indigenous Christian communities in the world! I feel pity for those who translate Christianity into winning converts. The first immigrations from Palestine were not done by force but through religious and educational missions: people were groomed to live in London, Detroit, and San Francisco, more than in their own villages and communities. In addition, missions transformed the worth of a person from one's inner harmony, and harmony with people and nature around him/her, to having the source of one's worth, measures and committees in London or Philadelphia. It is the sin of arrogance that misdirected those who came with good intentions and made them an instrument both of self-righteousness and racial superiority.

It is hard to overemphasize the role of domination of the cultural dimension in tearing apart the social fabric in society and robbing people of what they have, of their ways of living, relating, and learning, and of what they can do by themselves. Wasif Jouhariyyeh, a Palestinian Christian from Jerusalem, mentions in his memoirs (which included the periods before and after the British occupation of Palestine) that one of the very first military regulations imposed by the British was related to the public space - the commons - around al-Aqsa Mosque. That space

was open to inhabitants of Jerusalem, of all religious and ethnic backgrounds where they interacted freely. The new regulation assigned certain days for Muslims, others for Christians, and others for Jews - claiming that they want to ensure that the rights of all were observed! It is a revealing example of how the British tore apart societies. They transformed a pluralistic society into a sectarian one with a simple law that claimed to care for rights! It is an amazingly ingenious and subtle act of evil. Over the years, the neighboring among different religions was substituted by words such as "religious dialogue," "comparative religions," and the like - which, more often than not, tear apart the social fabric among people. The words in Arabic for this transformation are beautiful to mention here: transforming *tajaawur* into *tahaawur* - from neighboring to dialogue!

Jesus always stressed what people could do rather than the evil done to them. He would flip the current stress from remembering the evil done, to remembering what people did to keep life going; from the destruction caused by power to the spirit of regeneration. He would remind us of how what sustained us throughout the years were the love and mutual help and support among people.

Munir Fasheh was born in Jerusalem in 1941. He has a doctorate in education from Harvard University and has been working in education for four decades (in Palestine and the US) in harmony with "learning without teaching."

BREAKING THE SILENCE ABOUT AL-NAKBA

by: George B. Sahbar

More than 60 years ago a generation of Palestinians was transformed; whether they lived in lavish homes or they were simple farmers, they lost their property and became refugees. They were supposed to vanish into oblivion, their stories never to be told and their experience forgotten. The old were supposed to die and the young were supposed to forget, and their suffering would never be recognized or redeemed.

It seems that for many years, those who lived through Al-Nakba succumbed to their fate; they prayed and mourned quietly, as they continued to bleed emotionally. They were frightened, and from behind barbed wires they dreamt quietly.

Why do people who go through tumultuous experiences remain quiet? There were some who could not imagine or believe what happened to them, others saw it as an episode that will go away quickly because in the end justice will prevail, while there were others who kept their door keys-imagining to the minutest detail that the door will remain in its place.

But what happened when reality sank in, and they realized there were others in their kitchens and in their beds? They remained frightened and they wept silently. Yet, something interesting was taking place too- they believed that they knew the truth, and

in a perfectly prophetic way, they were liberated because of their narrative, and because their memory was as concrete as the belongings they left behind. The Bible tells us that the truth shall set you free; it sets you free to remember, free to tell the story so it does not fade away, and most importantly, the truth sets you free to work for peace.

It is that yearning for peace that kept them going. My father was 25 years old when they lost their home in Baqqa', in what became West Jerusalem, they fled at gunpoint, so they locked the door and left, and in an expression of hope they left the lights on. In 1967, my father went back as a stranger, and when he stood outside the gate, a woman walked out of the house and asked him what he was doing there. He told her he came there because he wanted to remember his mother who had died, and that this was their home. "Listen," she told him, "I bought this house from the government, and if I ever see you again I will call the police for you." He went back quietly, but the narrative never died in his heart, and he continued to talk about the home, his father's Regency Hotel and Cinema, and the Sports Club they owned, but most importantly he never became bitter or hateful, and he remained a kind and gentle person.

Also my mother was a little girl, 12 years old, when they fled Jaffa. They were living there because her father was

a customs officer and he worked in the seaport. They had rented the home of Franjiyyeh family. Sure, the home was never theirs, but it became part of their narrative- they fled in fear, they did not know where they were heading, and they took the memories with them- so the Franjiyyeh home became part of their story. The facts never died and were never forgotten, they are being transferred to a new generation who works for peace, reconciliation, and dignity of the human being.

It was only in May 2008 that the children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren, along with human rights activists and friends from around the world, gathered in West Jerusalem, in front of the old homes and walked from one street to the other, in a show reminiscent of the way Jesus surprisingly came back from the dead to the disbelief of many.

Sure, someone might lose a home; the bed and the furniture, but they cannot forget the family album, the memories and stories. When they stood in front of each home, they meant to say that most of the old have died, but the young must work for peace and reconciliation.

George B. Sahbar is a Jerusalem native and board member of Sabeel. His writings are dedicated to peacemaking and to raising awareness about the need for justice and reconciliation.



Reflections on Sabeel's 3rd International Young Adult Conference 2008

by: Margaret Evans

“I have always had the privilege of freedom”

My name is Margaret and I am a 21-year-old Canadian. I have never been told where I can or cannot go or live. I have always had the privilege of freedom.

My reality compared to a Palestinian is as different as comparing East and West. I wake up every morning, and the only thing on my mind is, “What am I going to eat when I get upstairs?” I eat, hop into a car and travel about 30 kilometers to work. I only leave 30 minutes before my shift begins. I do not need to worry that anything could prevent me from getting to work on time.

At a checkpoint in Bethlehem, the Sabeel conference group waited 45 minutes to pass thirty feet from the West Bank to just another portion of the West Bank, sectioned off from itself. We passed through three segregated gates with multiple ID and visa checks before we were admitted. This was just a blink of an eye compared to a typical rush hour wait. We were told that Palestinians get up and wait in line beginning at 3:30 to 4 o'clock in the morning until the gate opens at 7 AM, just to get to work on time. From this the question “why?” arises. Is it a protection for the Israelis from the “terrorists?” The so-called Palestinian terrorists did not have any arms until the second Intifada at the end of 2001.

When the group was returning from a visit in Hebron, we encountered a true act of terrorism. While walking past a roadblock, it was brought to my attention that

two Israeli soldiers were harassing three little Palestinian girls who lived just around the corner. The children were backed up against a wall and the soldiers waved their guns casually at the children's feet. Some of the Palestinian participants began to yell at the soldiers in Arabic. The soldier suddenly switched his attention to the Palestinians in our group. He began to demand, "Are you Muslim or Christian?" pointing around the circle. The response from one of the Palestinians was profound and will remain ingrained on my heart forever. She said, "We are Christian, but why does it matter? Are we not all human?" Finally, the children were released, but one of the Palestinians was detained and his ID confiscated. This is reality. To speak up for injustice is to risk your own freedom.

My heart was heavy with questions. How long would the children have been harassed had we not intervened? How far would the soldiers have gone? The whole ordeal left a bitter and lasting taste in my mouth. Yet, I had to remind myself of my own injustices. Israelis walk around everyday knowing that this is happening, yet they ignore it. I cannot judge them, for how many times have I walked by a homeless person, a drug addict or another in need, and done nothing? How many more times will I do it? I cannot give an absolute answer that I will not ignore it again since my heart and my mind conflict with one another. Logically, I know that justice must be served, yet the reality of my environment makes me worry about little but materialistic problems.

So, where does this leave me? It leaves me with a promise that I will give my best, in whatever that form may be, and share this tragedy to help the world listen. I cannot promise perfection, since it does not exist, but my best is all I have to offer.

by: Hannah Öhlén

The second day into the conference, and it feels like a week. In a good way, that is. We have already experienced and learned so much, seen so many places, met so many people and heard so many stories. Being guided through the depopulated village of Lifta by a man who grew up there was intense. He showed us where their house used

to be, where they used to buy sweets and where the mosque stood. After being imprisoned for 17 years he still has no hatred in his voice while speaking about the Israelis. He still has hope.

Even though this is only the second day of the conference, it feels as if we have already met a lot of this kind of people. People who refuse to give up hope, even after 60 years of Nakba. They are desperate to share their stories to the rest of the world and us, being a link to the outside. These people are a hope in a place of hopelessness, and it is so very inspiring to meet them.

by: Lina Saleh

As a 23-year-old Palestinian, living in Jerusalem, this conference was so useful for me in many aspects. Primarily, I got to see all kinds of injustice, humiliations and sufferings in the West Bank and various kinds of indirect discrimination towards Arab Palestinians living in Israel.

Arresting a homeowner because he doesn't want to evacuate his home is the situation that affected me the most. Home demolishing that we saw in East Jerusalem and Ramle (which is considered to be in Israel) is a very common policy of the Israeli government in order to occupy more and more territories and to frighten Palestinians living here. This policy makes sure that the Palestinian communities in Jerusalem will not expand to a number that will threaten the status of Israel's Jewish majority.

When we were at the Bethlehem checkpoint, the discrimination that I felt towards me as a local (especially in comparison to the way the internationals were treated) left me feeling totally humiliated. The soldiers didn't

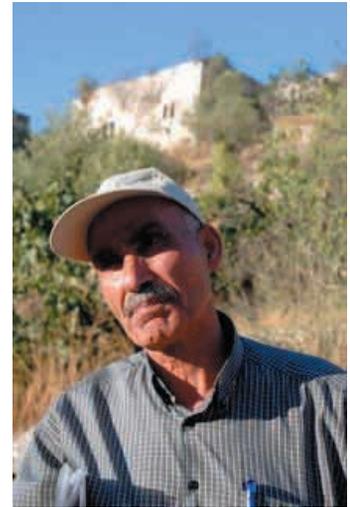


Photo by Jay Gregory

Photo by Jay Gregory



permit us to leave the checkpoint by claiming that our blue identity cards meant we weren't allowed to enter there at all. They seemed to be playing with the rules as they wanted and I was totally dependent upon the soldiers' whims at that moment. Such uncertainty makes every trip a question of "If" and further limits the freedom of movement of Palestinians.

When visiting the refugee camps in Bethlehem and Hebron, I was so impressed by all the young adults who live in these camps under hard circumstances but still achieve high levels of education. Their will to study and succeed is their only weapon for freedom. It touched my heart to see so much hope in the eyes of these young people who still struggle to have their basic needs met.

The personal interaction I had with the international participants of the conference was one of the best things I experienced at the conference. First of all, getting the chance to let non-Arabs see our situation and letting them know that the media does not accurately reflect what happens here was a major achievement. Secondly, the personal and friendly relationships that developed between the locals and the internationals will not be forgotten. They are evidence of the human value that don't know the difference between people, regardless of their language, nationality or way of life. In the end, we are all humans.

Margaret Evans is from Canada. She is currently in her fourth year of International Comparative Studies majoring in Globalization at the University of Ontario.

Hannah Öhlén is from Stockholm, Sweden. Last year worked as a volunteer for the Swedish Missionary Covenant church, teaching English at SIRA School in Bethlehem.

Lina Saleh lives in Jerusalem and is currently studying at Hebrew University. She received her Bachelor's in Education and French and is now pursuing her Master's in Conflict Resolution.

MY RESIDENC

I left the U.S., took a work leave without pay from my job, and traveled with my five-month old baby to my homeland, in order to renew my re-entry visa which would allow me to keep my residency status in "Israel." I met with a lawyer to help me renew my entry visa, but the Israelis refused to renew it. Instead, they told me that since I made the decision to marry an "American," who can't reside in Jerusalem (my husband was born and raised in Jerusalem but had his residency revoked in 2004; he now holds an American passport), and since I have acquired an American "Green Card", I have made a decision to seek residency in a foreign country. Therefore, I am "choosing" to abandon my residency rights in Jerusalem.

To make a long story short, I lost my residency rights in my own country. I can only go back to visit as a tourist, and I have to acquire a tourist visa from the Israeli embassy. The ironic thing is that all my family still lives there! But I can never join them, and I don't have a choice in the matter. We, the people of the land are being thrown out! I have lost my right to return to my country...to the only country I ever belonged to, the only place I ever called home.

...CY, NO MORE

by: Mona Nasir

On my way back from that meeting, I was stopped by Israeli soldiers who asked to see my papers—they spoke Russian to me. I thought to myself, these immigrants know nothing of this land they are serving and protecting—they don't even know the language. They come from Russia, Europe, Africa, the U.S., and other places, and they choose to reside in my country, and they can! Not only that but they can limit my movement in my country, and even kick me out of it! There is no human law that can protect me, or defend my rights.

As an adult who has been living under occupation for the past 33 years, I was upset, but I can't say that I was surprised by what happened to me. However, what really surprised me was what happened to my seven-month old son, Ramzi. Ramzi was born in the U.S. and therefore got an American passport. Although he is the son of two full-blooded Palestinians who call Jerusalem and Palestine home, he was denied residency rights in Jerusalem and was given a tourist visa.

I asked the lady at the airport when we first arrived if she could give Ramzi (then five-months old) a four month

visa, rather than the traditional three month visa. I showed her my residency card (at the time I was still considered a resident) and showed her our return plane tickets. She said no. I later applied to the Ministry of Interior and to my surprise Ramzi was denied. My lawyer also tried and Ramzi was still denied. The Israeli government refused to grant a seven-month old



Photo by Mona Nasir

Ramzi, Mona's son

baby an extension on his visa! I had to face the choice of leaving with Ramzi early and change our vacation plans, or stay with him as I had planned and have my son be illegally overstaying in the land of his ancestors. The ironic thing is that this poor little baby couldn't even say "mama" or "baba", yet he was causing a security threat to Israel that they denied him a one-

month extension on his visa! I decided to try again with the ministry because I was told that if the baby illegally overstays he could be blacklisted. So I tried again and again. Finally, the fifth time, Ramzi was given an extra month of extension on his tourist visa.

So now, my little family of three are added to the millions of Palestinians who lost their right to reside in their country and have been kicked out of their homes, but I will always refer to Palestine as my home. Since the 1948 Diaspora of our people, the Palestinians in the world have been waiting for a just solution, which would give them

the right to return to their homeland. And now, 60 years later the list gets longer everyday with people just like the three of us who were driven out of our country. I will never give up the hope that one day I would have the choice to live in Palestine, and I will make sure that Ramzi also knows that he has a right to return!

Mona Nasir is the daughter of Kameel and Abla Nasir. She received her Bachelor's and Master's degrees in Special Education at Hope College and Ohio State University. She is currently living in Las Vegas with her husband and son.

A Biblical Reflection: A Song of Justice

A Collaborative Bible Study by Sabeel's Third Young Adult Conference

From July 24-August 4, 2008, Sabeel held its third International Young Adult Conference. The conference brought together more than 40 young adults from Canada, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, the United Kingdom, the United States, Jerusalem, Nazareth, and Bethlehem. The theme of the conference was *The Nakba: 1948, Justice, and Beyond*. Participants learned about the history of 1948 from a Palestinian perspective, the current reality for Palestinians in the state of Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories, and the work of advocates for justice and peace—Palestinians and Israelis, Christian, Jew, Muslim, and secular. In order to provide a spiritual framework, the group worshipped together and participated in devotions and Bible studies. The following is a summary of the group's first experience of the collaborative contextualization that characterizes Sabeel's bible studies.

Participants at Sabeel's Third Young Adult Conference gathered for a Bible study at the Sisters of Zion convent in Ein Karem, the town of John the Baptist and of Mary's

visitation to Elizabeth. The group was asked to reflect on Mary's song (Luke 1:46-55) in the context of the current situation in Palestine and Israel. The Bible study participants were first introduced to the context of first century Palestine in which Mary lived—a period



characterized by Roman occupation and harsh divisions between the powerful and the powerless, the rich and the poor, the occupier and the occupied. How would this context inform Mary's proclamation that "God has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly"? What was Mary referring to when she praised a God who "has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts?" How would participants read this passage in light of the opening message given to them by Rev. Naim Ateek, in which he

instructed them to keep their eyes, ears, and hearts open for hope in the face of pain, nonviolence in the face of violence, justice in the face of injustice, and liberation in the face of oppression?

As the participants reflected on these questions, a more complex and liberating picture of the Magnificat began to emerge. One local participant commented on Mary's courage to cry out in the face of injustice, an action in stark contrast to the enforced silence of the church the group had just visited! Another struggled with how to be hopeful when sixty years of struggling for freedom still had not yielded a reality that could match the hope of Mary's song.

In response, an international participant stressed the importance of mourning loss and being honest with feelings of hopelessness before being able to arrive at Mary's hope in a God of justice and liberation.

One group member critiqued the text from a feminist perspective, questioning the limitation of women's voices in the Bible to a celebration of child birth. Could the message of the God of justice offer hope in the face of the hopelessness of overt and structural sexism? Yet another

reflected on the importance of keeping open lines of communication in order to bring about constructive change. Does Mary's cry against oppression offer any clues as to a nonviolent strategy for bringing about the changes that she associates with the activity of a God of justice? By examining Mary's song in the context of memory and reality after 60 years of Nakba, the young adults were able to begin developing their own theological framework for encountering the struggle for justice, peace, and reconciliation in Palestine and Israel. Through the process of sharing insights and readings of the text, participants were able to reclaim biblical narratives as stories of great hope and relevance in the face of oppression, violence, and injustice.

*From: Poem of the Land
by: Mahmoud Darwish*

Translated by Lena Jayyusi and Christopher Middleton

As if I returned
to what has been
As if I walked
in front of myself
I restore my harmony
between the trial and the verdict
I am the son
of simple words
I am the martyr of the map
the family apricot blossom
O you who grip the edge
of the impossible
From the beginning until Galilee
Return to me my hands
Return to me
My identity



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THE MAKINGS OF HISTORY SECRETS OF THE OLIVE TREES

by: Jewish Peace News (JPN)

The Ein Hod artists village describes itself on its Hebrew Internet site as “an ancient Israeli environment.” It belongs to “a Middle Eastern culture from other times” and, according to the English-language site, visitors can “discern in the old structures the many textures and architectural forms of earlier occupants - from the Christian Crusades to the Turkish Empire.”

The houses of the Arabs who lived there until 1948 are not mentioned. This is an unusual case:

A recently published study shows that the kibbutzim and moshavim that arose on the ruins of Arab villages do not usually omit this fact, even if the Arab residents themselves, who were expelled and fled, are almost never mentioned, as if they had never existed.

When writing her book “Beshulei haderekh uveshulei hatoda’a” (On the Road Side, on the Mind Side), published by November Books, geographer Noga Kadman began with the assumption that the Arab villages were pushed to the margins

of Israeli discourse. But when she examined internal newsletters and anniversary publications put out by kibbutzim and moshavim that had been established on the remains of these villages, she discovered an attitude of possessiveness and few moral qualms: There is no shame in living in Arabs’ houses, but it isn’t pleasant to mention the Arabs themselves. It is as though their history and their way of life had never existed. The takeover of the abandoned villages is often described as part of the effort to make the wilderness bloom.

“There was nothing there,” members of Kibbutz Barkai write in one pamphlet that is quoted in the book. There was some mention here and there of the Arabs “bequeathing” their lands, their homes and even their furniture and household goods to the new settlers.

“Our central clothing warehouse was adorned with a number of mahogany closets from the abandoned property,” states a Kibbutz Kabri publication. “Thus, we gradually equipped ourselves with a minimum of comfort.”

The Arabs who came back to rescue some of their property were considered thieves, and hunting them down was a source of income, as stated in a book that Kibbutz Carmia published on the occasion of the 35th anniversary of its establishment: “They came at night to steal fruit from the orchards and go back to Gaza laden with loot ... We guarded the area of the kibbutz from them ... We would catch prisoners, bring them back to the kibbutz and the army picked them up every morning and paid us ... Inside the kibbutz there was a kind of ‘jail’ - a small tin shack - where they would keep the prisoners until the army took them.”

Kadman found evidence of pangs of conscience in the publications of only two kibbutzim, Yiron and Sasa. A Yiron bulletin from 1949 states: “The facts show that men, women, old people and babies were murdered, villages were destroyed

and burned down, with no justification.”

One of the members of Sasa wrote: “I am thinking about the abandoned village Sa’sa that we entered this morning with pride and energy, and about the lives of the Arabs who lived here. I wandered through some of the decrepit houses. I looked at jugs that had been turned upside down, harvested grains, books, baby shoes, and I smelled the odor of destruction ... The comrades debated what to do about the mosque. The army had destroyed it and most of the comrades agreed that this was ‘inevitable.’”

At Kibbutz Beit Ha’emek, someone wondered about the ancient olive trees, asking himself what the trees would have related about “different people and many harvests,” if they had been able to speak.

*Excerpt from Shimon Tzabar’s
autobiography*

...In the mid fifties, I received a letter from the Painters and Sculptors Association, of which I was a member, saying that the government had allocated a village at the foothills of Mount Carmel, to be a village for artists. It was called Ein Hod. All I had to do to get a house there was to pay fifty Israeli pounds as a registration fee and choose myself where I wanted to live. I didn’t have that amount of money, so I borrowed it from a friend, Chana Shofman, the daughter of a Likud MP. I paid the

money and rushed to Ein Hod to choose a house in the country. I found a very nice Arab house, because this village had been an Arab village before. I kept this house as a weekend retreat.

A few weeks later when I came to my house in Ein Hod, I walked around the village and strolled uphill along the main road. After a while, I met a Palestinian shepherd boy with two mongrel dogs. The dogs started barking at me while the boy tried to keep them away. By and by we started a conversation. The boy spoke Hebrew quite well. I asked him where he was from. He said that he was from Ein Hod. It was the same Ein Hod where I have just acquired a house. The boy told me that a few years ago, the Israeli army had come to the village and asked its people to move for a week to the next Arab village, that was a few kilometers uphill, because they were going to do some live ammunition maneuvers around the area and did not want anyone to get hurt. Since then they were not been allowed back. That is how the village was deserted and been given to us, the artists.

I relinquished the house and asked back my I£50 registration fee, which I promptly returned to Ms Shofman.

Jewish Peace News (JPN) is an information service that circulates news clippings, analyses, editorial commentary, and action alerts concerning the Israel / Palestine conflict.

Purpose Statement *of* Sabeel

Sabeel is an ecumenical grassroots liberation theology movement among Palestinian Christians. Inspired by the life and teaching of Jesus Christ, this liberation theology seeks to deepen the faith of Palestinian Christians, promote unity among them, and lead them to act for justice and love. *Sabeel* strives to develop a spirituality based on justice, peace, non-violence, liberation, and reconciliation for the different national and faith communities. The word 'Sabeel' is Arabic for 'the way' and also a 'channel' or 'spring' of life-giving water.

Sabeel also works to promote a more accurate international awareness regarding the identity, presence, and witness of Palestinian Christians as well as their contemporary concerns. It encourages individuals and groups from around the world to work for a just, comprehensive, and enduring peace informed by truth and empowered by prayer and action.

For more information on *Friends of Sabeel* groups in your area please contact our international representatives or the Sabeel Center in Jerusalem.



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