



The 7 Unitarian Universalist Principles and



Palestine-Israel Adult RE Study Guide

Curriculum Team of Unitarian Universalists for Justice in the Middle East

June 2015, First Edition, Revised with URLs Sept. 2015



Cover photo: Emile Ashrawi; TOC photo: UUs at interfaith peace vigil during Summer 2015 Gaza War; back cover photo: Pat Westwater-Long

Table of Contents

About This Publication	3
UU Leaders Who Endorsed a Call to Study in 2013	4
Preparation for Facilitators	5
Curriculum Outline	8
Guidelines for Dialogue	9
Session One – Principle 3	10
Session Two – Principle 1	24
Session Three – Principle 2	26
Session Four – Principle 4	36
Session Five – Principle 5	38
Session Six – Principle 6	45
Session Seven – Principle 7	51
Study Group Wrap-Up	58
Resources	59
TIAA-CREF Petition	62

Please do not copy and paste any materials in this guide into other documents or emails without permission.
Use articles and essays as written in their entirety.

About This Publication

In 2013, the board of Unitarian Universalists for Justice in the Middle East (UUJME) launched a proposal for a Congressional Study Action Issue on Israel-Palestine, with endorsements from several congregations and leading UU figures (see page 3). Our proposal did not make the list for a final vote at General Assembly. Other faith-based groups have developed curricula to help their adherents study the Palestine-Israel conflict, which is now in its seventh decade following the creation of the state of Israel. Consequently, in 2014, the UUJME board established the Reflection and Learning Project to encourage congregational study of the issue using guides from the Presbyterians, *Steadfast Hope* and *Zionism Unsettled*. Grants from Community Church of New York City UU greatly enhanced financial support for our Reflection and Learning Project. UUJME also decided to embark upon a UU curriculum to provide guidance and healing for many in our faith tradition and encouragement to engage in difficult conversations on the matter. We found an opportunity to elaborate on a study guide based on the principles that had been produced by Elissa Goss and piloted in Olympia, Washington, in 2014, to develop this guide. Readings within this guide were compiled from articles and essays written by UUs, correspondence with UUs around the country, including ministers and UUs of Jewish and Palestinian origin, and resources from allied U.S., Israeli, and Palestinian groups. We begin with the third principle to call attention to the spiritual growth inherent in tackling a difficult issue and engaging in respectful dialogue.

The curriculum consists of three components: this study guide available in sections on our website and two accompanying video presentations available online via UUJME's Vimeo site. One video honors those who have suffered mass displacement and discrimination in human history. The other video lifts up a theme of solidarity, honoring the many who work for a just peace and inspire us to have hope and move into action. Each session in the guide begins with a set of pre-readings and/or videos to pre-view. It then focuses on a UU principle and an elaboration as found on the UUA website, with grounding questions for discussion and activities that include viewing videos and discussing articles.

UUJME supports ending the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories taken in 1967 and stopping the settlements, and seeks to change U.S. foreign policy to support these goals. This curriculum reflects these opinions, and the opinion that the sides in this conflict are not equal; there is a much stronger oppressing power and a much weaker occupied population. UUJME supporters hold differing opinions on political tactics and solutions, but share UU values, which inform our mission: to educate ourselves and our fellow UUs and citizens about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and its legal, moral and ethical issues in an effort to bring about peace and justice in Israel-Palestine, including a settlement of the conflict affirming the equality, dignity, freedom and security of all peoples involved.

By engaging in study you are already taking a kind of action, and in this curriculum you will see other kinds of action highlighted. The last session provides an explanation of many forms of action including the boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) movement called for by Palestinian society, and concludes with a list of ideas for planning actions as an individual, a group, or a congregation, to support the process of achieving peace with justice for Israelis and Palestinians.

Our hope is that this guide will provide a platform for respectful dialogue, and that engaging in difficult conversations from the heart in covenant together will be an act of spiritual growth in accordance with our third principle. We request that readers send feedback and endorsements to curriculum@uujme.org.

UU Leaders Who Endorsed a Call to Study Israel-Palestine in 2013

Leading UU figures endorsed a call in Fall 2013 to study the Israel-Palestine issue via a proposed Congregational Study Action Issue (CSAI) that UUJME submitted for national consideration. Here are some of their reasons why.



I support the CSAI on *UU Values and the Pursuit of a Just Peace for Israelis and Palestinians*. Peace in the Middle East is crucial to peace for the whole world, and we should be addressing the issues, including the systematic oppression and

discrimination suffered by the Palestinians. Realizing that this issue is complex and controversial, I nevertheless believe that Unitarian Universalists should not shrink from taking it on, as we have done in other tough justice issues grounded in racial or ethnic difference.

—**Rev. Dr. Marilyn Sewell**

Minister Emeritus of First Unitarian Church of Portland, Oregon, Subject of 2010 documentary Raw Faith



I support Israel. I long to see Israel be a healthy stable state, not threatened from within or without. However, Israel's occupation of Palestinian lands threatens the very

soul of Israel. Israel's existence in the present and its long-term health is at risk. Now is a good time for Middle East peace. Now is a good time for Unitarian Universalists to become more familiar with the complex set of issues involved in reaching a peaceful future for Israel. I support the proposal for a Congregational Study/Action issue on UU values and the pursuit of a just peace for all people of Israel and Palestine.

—**Rev. Jim Eller**

Vice-President of Unitarian Universalist Retired Ministers and Partners Association; Minister Emeritus of All Souls Unitarian Church of Kansas City, Missouri

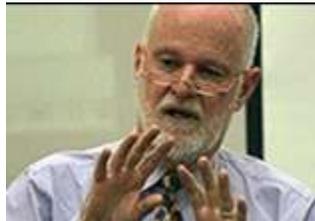


My support for the CSAI, *UU Values and the Pursuit of a Just Peace for Israelis and Palestinians*, is grounded in our experience at First Unitarian, Portland. The congregation has

taken this question seriously, but it required all the strength of our covenant to do it well. The depth of feeling on all sides of this issue makes thoughtful reflection and even respectful discussion difficult, even in our communities. That reality is a sign of the importance of this issue and the need for a process that is both open enough and grounded enough to hold the important emotional and spiritual issues that are involved. That space is what the CSAI can provide.

—**Rev. Dr. William G. Sinkford**

Senior Minister at First Unitarian Church of Portland, Oregon; former President of the Unitarian Universalist Association



The proposed CSAI on *UU Values and the Pursuit of a Just Peace for Israelis & Palestinians* is long overdue. There is no more important issue to peace in the Middle East than

resolving this nagging conundrum of American foreign policy. Its complexity requires careful analysis and it needs informed UU voices who are willing to weigh in.

—**Charlie Clements, M.D.**

Executive Director, Carr Center for Human Rights Policy, Harvard Kennedy School, Cambridge, Massachusetts; Former President/CEO of UUSC

The above statements do not constitute endorsement of the study guide.

Preparation for Study Group Facilitators

Thank you for volunteering to be a facilitator. In this book, we hope to help guide the facilitation process to make it as seamless as possible. You can reach us at curriculum@uujme.org for help regarding resources, hard questions, or logistics, and we can through this email connect you with one of the UUs who have led various Israel-Palestine study groups in the past two years for further discussion.

We encourage you to remember these three points:

1) **You do not need to be an expert or have extensive background on Israel and/or Palestine.**

We hope to provide enough information that the curriculum is a co-learning space for everyone involved, including you as the facilitator. It is likely that someone in your group will be knowledgeable about aspects of the issue and can help, although no one individual has all the knowledge on this issue.

2) **Consider yourself a guide rather than a teacher.**

Ensure the space is set up ahead of time, hand out any extra information, be or oversee a time keeper, facilitate discussion and help move the group along to the next activity or question.

3) **This is a learning experience for all of us!**

This is the first attempt at a national curriculum on this topic for our UU congregations. Any feedback and suggestions will help each subsequent group to have an even better experience.

How to Organize the Study Group at Your Congregation

Meet with Minister or Social Justice Coordinator to find out when there is space and time to host a 4- to 8-session curriculum at the church. Find out what steps to follow. Register the class as an “Adult RE” (high schoolers are welcome) and make sure a description (sample below) is posted on the website and/or Adult RE calendar. Consider inviting members and friends of other UU congregations in the area, as well as members of other faith or secular groups in the community. Consider asking the group to read *The Lemon Tree*, by Sandy Tolan, as a good background.

A local study group of the national curriculum from UUs for Justice in the Middle East, “The Seven UU Principles and Palestine-Israel,” will be offered at our congregation. This curriculum seeks to help UUs build awareness around human rights issues for Palestinians and Israelis in a peace-with-justice framework and present ideas for planning and taking action. It will be conducted based on a covenant that creates a safe space for sharing opinions, seeking truth and deepening community. Sessions will include readings, videos, activities and discussion. The curriculum is designed for adults, and is also appropriate for high school youth. The dates for the study group are _____ . It is recommended to pre-read *The Lemon Tree*, by Sandy Tolan. The book is available from Amazon and the author’s website. [Or see ___ to prepay for a copy of the book.]

Once you have completed the sign-ups, email each person a copy of the guide so they can do the prereading. Alternatively, order enough printed copies for each group member from the UJME website; we have a grant to cover the cost of printing and mailing for part of 2015. If you would like to donate \$5 per guide to cover the cost of printing and mailing, please send a check to our PO Box listed on the back cover with “UU Curriculum” in the memo line. Check with staff to make sure that you will have access to the equipment below. We suggest doing a trial run with any videos, slide presentations, or Internet streaming.

Equipment to Obtain:

- Laptop with internet, power cable
- Ethernet cable if no wireless connection is available
- Projector or Internet-compatible TV to stream videos and PPT
- Mac “pigtail” cable for projector (if using Apple computer)
- Chairs and tables
- Note cards, printed material if desired such as pre-readings for the next session if not emailing the separately available pre-reading files to the group
- Visit the website for a movie suggested for Session Four pre-reading/viewing, *Peace, Propaganda and the Promised Land*, and decide if you wish to rent or purchase the entire movie ahead of time. See <http://www.mediaed.org/cgi-bin/commerce.cgi?preadd=action&key=117>. It is \$19.95 for a DVD, and \$50 for 7-day online streaming rental rights. The alternative is the 4-minute trailer.

Facilitator Tasks Before Class Starts:

- Test the links for videos and download material from Internet
- Verify wifi connection, obtain any passwords needed
- Print/copy materials if desired
- Set up chairs
- Obtain refreshments, perhaps alternating Israeli and Palestinian foods
- Email the people who sign up to welcome them and confirm meeting times, and to see if anyone wants to order *The Lemon Tree* through you, if you are offering this convenience. The suggested email template is below; copy and paste into the email body.

Dear friend,

Thanks for signing up for the study group on Israel-Palestine. We will have our first session on ____ at ____ am/pm. For background, consider getting the book *The Lemon Tree*, by Sandy Tolan, from me, a library, or Amazon or the author’s website. The book is based on a documentary aired on PBS interviewing a Palestinian man and a Jewish Israeli woman whose families claim the same home, showing the history and impact of the first major displacement of Palestinians in the late 1940s, the root of much of the conflict today. If you have obtained a copy of the study guide, please do the pre-reading for each session ahead of our gathering. If desired, I can provide the pre-reading files ahead of the session or point you to <http://www.uujme.org/home/TakeAction/LearnandReflect.aspx>. Please let me know of any questions or concerns. I look forward to our studies.

Optimal class size: 4 to 20. If the group is more than seven, use small breakout groups for discussion.

Optimal length: 1 ½ to 2 hours. We recommend having a 10 minute break about half-way.

Optimal number of sessions: You can attempt four 3-hour double sessions, or seven 1.5-hour sessions.

Learning Styles: This curriculum aims to frame study of the topics from a UU perspective; hence, the organization around the seven UU principles. Some people will not relate easily to this organization of ideas. Encourage these participants to try to work with the curriculum as best they can. Some people prefer a more linear historical format and could consider a separate study group using Phyllis Bennis’s *Understanding the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict: A Primer*. See the Resources pages at the end of this guide for where to find this and

other materials listed. Other people may prefer to start a study group with a faith-based study guide from the Presbyterians and Episcopalians such as *Steadfast Hope* or *Zionism Unsettled*.

Healthy Group Process: The study group must begin and continue as a safe space for expressing ideas. Many UUs are grieving over the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The way to establish this tone is based on using a guideline for dialogue, to follow a deep listening rather than debate format, and to assign two people at each session to the roles of timekeeper and process observer, leaving time at the end of each session to evaluate. The Process Observer keeps the discussion within respectful bounds. Print the Guidelines for Dialogue piece for each participant and read at the beginning of each session (see page 8). Consider leaving a few minutes at the beginning and end for people to check in and check out. If you or the congregational leadership anticipate the need, consider securing the services of a lay chaplain to assist with respectful communication.

Spiritual Rituals: Begin each session by lighting a chalice and reading a UU principle. End each session with a reading and extinguishing of the chalice.

Resources: Several options for background learning are listed with each lesson, which the facilitator might need to email to the participants a week ahead of time. Preparing for the session increases understanding of the issues.

Three Major Issues

Three major issues are often discussed with regard to Israel-Palestine. They will be covered in varying depth during this study: One State/Two State, the Right of Return, and the Status of Jerusalem. Many people, especially in the United States, wish and look for the best answer to the question of whether to support a "one-state or two-state solution" as an answer to the suffering. We encourage and ask participants to not weigh the information against this binary approach. We feel that the information and experiences contained in the curriculum can help expand understanding of the many facets of the conflict, and lead to a more developed approach to action and partnerships. There will be time to explore the question of "one-state or two-state," but that is not the foundation of this curriculum.

Inspirations

This curriculum is informed and inspired by many sources, including the Unitarian Universalist Association's Standing on the Side of Love campaigns, the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee, Churches for Middle East Peace, World Council of Churches, the American Friends Service Committee, the Israel-Palestine Mission Network of the Presbyterian Church (USA), Just Vision, Jewish Voice for Peace, Open Hillel, Nakba Education Project, Zochrot, many Palestinian organizations working for peace with justice, the *UUJME Newsletter*, *Kairos Palestine*, *Steadfast Hope*, *Zionism Unsettled*, *Middle East Research and Information Project Primer*, and Phyllis Bennis's *Understanding the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict: A Primer*. Links to information about these and other resources are in the lessons and/or the Resource page at the end of the guide and the UUJME website.

We are inspired also by those who choose to implement this part of the UUJME Reflection & Learning Project, and wish you the best in this endeavor to stand on the side of love with the people of Israel-Palestine.

Questions

There are more than 12 study groups UU that have been conducted across the United States in the past two years with materials recommended by UUJME. This curriculum has been previewed partially by one group of UUs. All the study group leaders and the curriculum writers are willing to share their advice and experiences; we can connect you if you send an email to curriculum@uujme.org.

7 UU Principles and Palestine-Israel Study Guide Outline

Sessions are designed for 90 to 120 minutes. Each is supplied with a list of materials and online resources. Each has an opening and closing reading related to the topics and principles. Discussion questions are included for each session.

Principles	Topics	Overview
<p>Session One 3rd Principle Acceptance of One Another & Encouragement to Spiritual Growth in Our Congregations</p>	<p>Background and Covenant Background of conflict Covenant and community Embracing Differences Tension Between Accepting and Growing Spirituality Beyond Fight or Flight</p>	<p>Sessions One, Two and Three present readings and activities that emphasize subjective experience of this conflict, in line with principles 3, 1, and 2.</p> <p>If you prefer a linear, historical approach, consider starting your study group with Phyllis Bennis's <i>Primer</i>, then returning to the Principles outline as appropriate.</p>
<p>Session Two 1st Principle: The Inherent Worth & Dignity of Every Person</p>	<p>Honoring Historical and Current Pain Diasporas and Displacements in Human History: Slave Trade, Native Americans, Anti-Semitism, Pogroms against Jews, Holocaust, Japanese Internment, Nakba and Diaspora, Occupation, Settlements, Movement Restriction, Gaza</p>	
<p>Session Three 2nd Principle: Justice, Equity and Compassion in All Human Relations</p>	<p>Injustice Stories of Symbolic Israelis and Palestinians Hebron as a Case Study of Occupation</p>	
<p>Session Four 4th Principle: A Free and Responsible Search for Truth and Meaning</p>	<p>Finding the Real Stories Myths and Facts Water Disparities as a Case Study in Facts</p>	<p>Session Four looks at obstacles that obstruct a “free and responsible search for truth and meaning.”</p>
<p>Session Five 5th Principle: The Right of Conscience & the Use of the Democratic Process within Our Congregations & in Society at Large</p>	<p>Honoring the Courage in Prophetic Witnessing Israelis and Palestinians speaking out UUs bearing prophetic witness</p>	<p>Session Five lifts up voices of those searching their consciences.</p>
<p>Session Six 6th Principle: The Goal of World Community with Peace, Liberty and Justice for All</p>	<p>Building World Community Reconciliation Strategies for solidarity with justice-seeking Israelis and Palestinians</p>	<p>Session Six features peace-with-justice activists who are leading the way in the search for “peace, liberty and justice for all.”</p>
<p>Session Seven 7th Principle: Respect for the Interdependent Web of Existence, of Which We Are All a Part</p>	<p>Intersections: Solidarity and Hope Connecting the dots and ourselves to reach beyond and have an impact What we pay for the occupation Solidarity efforts Boycott-Divestment-Sanctions movement</p>	<p>Session Seven explores our direct connections to events in Palestine-Israel, and the many possibilities for being in solidarity with those seeking peace with justice there that can give us hope and a sense of empowerment to help, calling UUs into further action.</p>

The Israel-Palestine conflict is often an “elephant in the room,” a difficult topic that is avoided due to concerns about offending others. Here are guidelines to support safe dialogue.



Guidelines for Open and Loving Congregational Dialogue on Israel-Palestine

We expect reflection and learning groups to be conducted in an open and welcoming manner in which all views may be expressed and listened to without fear of disrespect or hostile responses. Controversial topics often stir strong passions among UUs in their “search for truth and meaning.” Effort should be made to minimize objections or conflict regarding a study program on Israel-Palestine. It will be worthwhile to inform the minister and indeed all interested persons of an intent to conduct a study program. All must be assured of the welcoming and respectful nature of the intended program. Some UUJME chapters have found it useful to write a “pledge” to guide their discussions. Here is such a pledge from Joel Neiditz, of Theodore Parker Church in Boston. Feel free to use or adapt this pledge as you see fit. Have the group read the guidelines aloud at the start of each session to assist with remaining in covenant.

Guidelines for Dialoguing in the Beloved Community

Because we aspire to create an inclusive community
where love and mutual respect are
continuously nurtured and supported, even as we discuss complex and challenging issues
about which we may strongly disagree,
we pledge:

To fully own what we think and feel by using “I messages” when speaking.

To embody genuine curiosity through listening deeply and actively
with eyes, ears, body, heart and mind
to the thoughts and feelings of others.

To respond to each other gently and without criticism or argument,
recognizing that we are each expressing our own personally valid truths
and that those truths may be radically different from each other.

To be mindful of sharing the air time with all discussants.

While developing consensus through this process is not our goal,
we hope to inspire participants, either individually or collectively,
to take right action in the world.

—Joel Neiditz

Theodore Parker UU Church, Boston, MA

May 2013

Session One

3rd Principle

Acceptance of One Another & Encouragement to Spiritual Growth in Our Congregations

Background and Covenant

- Background of conflict
- Covenant and community

Embracing Differences

- Tension Between Accepting and Growing
- Spirituality Beyond Fight or Flight

Prereading and previewing:

- *Israel/Palestine 101*, 6:28 minutes, <http://www.israelpalestine101.org/>
- “The Incredible Shrinking Palestine,” <http://jvpchicago.org/resources/brief-history>
- PBS Timeline, <http://pov-tc.pbs.org/pov/pdf/promises/promises-timeline.pdf>
- FAQ on the Nakba, <http://imeu.org/article/faq-on-the-nakba-the-nakba-and-palestinian-refugees-today>
- Israel-Palestine in Context
- Essays by Unitarian Universalists of Jewish and Palestinian heritage
 - Essay by Steven Bell, Psychologist and UU of Jewish heritage
 - Sermon by Hanan Watson, UU of Palestinian heritage, http://uujme.org/home/Portals/0/hanan_sermon.pdf
 - Essay by Susan Lawrence, UU of Jewish heritage, in response to Hanan Watson’s sermon

Activities:

- Opening Reading and Grounding Questions
- Reading of “Guidelines for Dialogue”
- Power Shuffle activity
- Sharing stories of awareness of Israel/Palestine
- Video, Conflict in Israel and Palestine: Crash Course, <http://youtu.be/Iwo2TLIMhiw>, 10 minutes
- Discussion
- Article, [Loving the Contradictions](#) from *UU World/The Seven Principles in Word and Worship*, <http://www.uuworld.org/ideas/articles/23672.shtml>
- Discuss embracing differences

Principle 3: Acceptance of One Another & Encouragement to Spiritual Growth in Our Congregations

Sessions One, Two and Three present readings and activities that emphasize subjective experience of this conflict, in line with principles 3, 1, and 2.

Pre-reading

Israel-Palestine in Context

By Dana Ashrawi

It is very important to recognize and honor the people who feel the historic and current pain that Jews, Palestinians, and other groups have experienced, and the current pain caused by oppression and racism. Racism continues to be an issue in many parts of the world. In the United States, the #Black Lives Matter movement has sprung up to say “Enough” to police brutality and unjustified use of lethal force. The Palestinian people are very familiar with brutality and unjustified use of lethal force. The increased spotlight on violence against black people in the U.S. comes as we mark decades being at



some kind of war, news of militarization of police forces with surplus weaponized vehicles, and news reports of U.S. police leaders being flown to Israel for counter terrorism training.

The larger context of the Israel-Palestine conflict cannot be seen separately from the military campaigns that have been occurring throughout the Middle East for more than 100 years. The Arabs were the first population bombarded by air. Their despotic leaders hold vast oil reserves. Our U.S. multinational corporations find it convenient for despotic leaders to control populations in these areas. The Arab Spring of a few years ago has not born democratic fruit in most cases. From 9/11 to today, Islamophobia has been whipped up, threatening to disunite and confuse well-meaning people. Anti-Arab, anti-Middle Eastern racism and prejudice have been well-documented in news media, entertainment media, and in the general culture, just as anti-Semitism is a well-documented phenomenon from at least the 1700s here. Even the beloved Unitarian minister and anti-slavery activist, Rev. Theodore Parker, had some anti-Semitic writings.

We are not by any means living in a post-racist, post-anti-Semitic society or world. But the hostilities that have caused so much death among native populations in Iraq and Afghanistan are not helping to engender a reasoned approach among the American people. One of the most popular movies of 2014, *American Sniper*, is a glorification of killing Muslims. No one would tolerate a similar movie about killing Jews, blacks, or Hispanics. External powers carved up the Middle East in the past, and are continuing to do so today. This policy has a consequence called “blowback” by the former CIA agent Chalmers Johnson. The rise of the organization that calls itself the Islamic State has been linked in some press to the dismantling of Saddam Hussein’s security forces by the West.

For the Jewish people, the Holocaust was a major impetus that drove immigration to Palestine, although much immigration started early in the 20th century as a result of the international Zionist movement growing. The Holocaust, and the pogroms in Europe that led up to it, were a source of extreme tragedy for Jews. The scale of death and injury is difficult to comprehend. The historical trauma experienced is not to be imagined.

For the Palestinian people, a different scale of death and injury has been ongoing for more than 70 years. Their displacement began in the years leading up to the partition of Palestine when it climaxed and 750,000 people fled in fear of violence from Zionist armed groups who had carried out atrocities such as massacres in many villages, and in many cases surrounding a village on three sides to force the inhabitants to flee from the open side, and shooting at those fleeing. People who tried to return were often shot on sight by snipers, and many died attempting to return to their homes. This event is referred to as the Nakba, meaning “disaster” or “catastrophe.” More than 500 villages were abandoned, never again to be entered. This event is often unknown to the average American, and must be grasped to understand the conflict.

Palestinians have resisted the displacements since before 1948, militarily and peacefully. Armed groups attacked Jewish areas several times during the waves of Jewish Zionist immigration, with many deaths suffered among the Jewish population. Armed Palestinians attempted to defend their villages and towns from terrorist attacks by Jewish Zionist military groups. A massacre occurred in Deir Yassin at the hands of Zionist groups, resulting in the deaths of over 100 Palestinian civilians. Many other villages experienced military attacks by Zionist militants in 1948.

Displacement has been ongoing as Israel invaded the West Bank in 1967 and began a military and settler occupation that has continued to this day. Homes and land are continuing to be expropriated and people continue to be displaced internally and continue to experience



In the years-long near complete blockade of the Gaza Strip, thousands of Palestinians have suffered permanent disability including amputations, blindness and deafness, as a result of Israeli incursions against Gaza. Above: Ziyad is a Palestinian who was injured during Israeli bombardment of his home during the January 2009 war in the Gaza Strip. He received support from the Gaza Community Mental Health Programme staff. He lost his father and two brothers in the same attack. Below: Farah is a Palestinian girl injured by white phosphorous bombs in the 2009 Gaza war. Photos: Eman Mohammed. From *Life is Worth Living*, Gaza Community Mental Health Foundation.



increasing restrictions on movement. Many people are held without charge for months to years. Up to 700 Palestinian children are arrested each year, often for the charge of throwing stones, as young as age 11 or 12. They are often transported across the border into Israel to a prison facility, and report experiencing violence.



Aftermath of suicide bombing in Jerusalem, 1996. Dept. of State

Terrorist acts were committed by Palestinian militants in the 1970s, 1980s, 1990s, and in the current century. Hundreds of Israeli civilians have been killed and injured in such attacks. A giant concrete wall of separation is being constructed, allegedly to deter terrorist attacks. Much of the wall has been built on expropriated Palestinian land. The town of Bethlehem, famous for the Christmas birth story, is mostly surrounded by this wall, and the lives of its Palestinian Christian and Muslim families are made exceedingly difficult by the wall and the accompanying security checkpoints.

Before the wall was started, two Palestinian organized uprisings occurred, called “intifadas.” These were organized pockets of resistance that involved slingshots, tire burning and other non-peaceful methods, but they also involved general work strikes and the organization of nonviolent resistance activities such as neighborhood education committees to carry on the elementary through university curriculum programs due to frequent school closings. Israeli response was swift and brutal. Israeli military assaults on the Gaza Strip several times in the past decade have resulted in repeated displacements of hundreds of thousands of people, and many deaths. Some compare Gaza to a giant prison, the American Japanese internment camps of World War II and even

concentration camps. The actions by Israel highlighted in this paragraph have all been deemed illegal under international law—continuing an occupation, restricting freedom of movement, expropriating land, demolishing homes and orchards, and bombarding civilian areas. Many Palestinians have died as a result of Israeli military and settler violence. A documented rightward trend with racist and anti-peace movement expressions in Israeli politics and the Israeli public has caused alarm. Israelis protesting military assaults on Gaza in the summer of 2014 were beaten by other Israelis. A former Israeli foreign minister called for the “beheading” of disloyal Arabs, and current Prime Minister Netanyahu invoked and incited racist sentiment in his warning during the spring 2015 Israeli elections that there were “Arabs voting in droves.” The peace with justice movement in Israel and in Palestine struggles to make progress. More and more organizations have been created to support their efforts. The response from Israel continues to escalate – changes to the constitution, implementing more laws to be a Jewish state, attacks on Gaza, escalation of settlement construction, calling the entire Palestinian people the enemy and saying “This is war”. . . Will the hawkish trend predominate in the coming years? Or is the escalating isolation of Israel for its actions on the brink of delivering peace with justice?



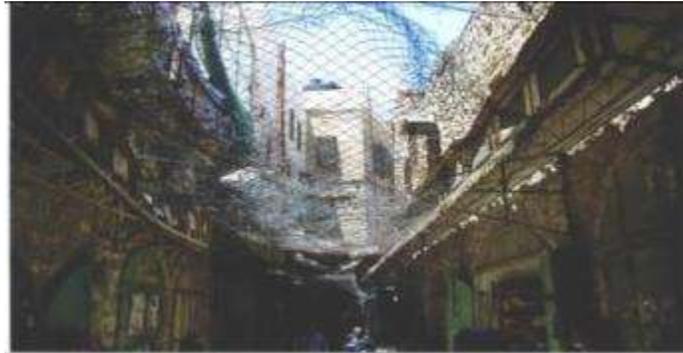
Essay on Palestine and Israel

By Steve Bell, a UU of Jewish heritage and co-founder of the UUJME chapter in Atlanta

These are my experiences and beliefs on Palestine/Israel as they relate to three UU principles. The inherent worth and dignity of every person. Justice, equity and compassion in human relations. The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all.

I was born and raised Jewish. I married Linda, a non-Jew; began a nearly 40 years teaching career at Berry College; had four children, and was two term President of Rome’s *Rodeph Shalom* synagogue. It bothered Linda that I was a liberal on every issue but spread hawk wings regarding Israel and her relationship to Palestine. We read Sandy Tolan’s *Lemon Tree*, I was shocked to disbelief. Could my lifelong premise be wrong? I grew up with “The Promised Land narrative” (“This Land is Mine, God Gave This Land to Me” by singer Andy Williams in *the Exodus* theme song). Could it be false? The promised land was actually stolen from the Palestinian Arabs as **they were driven** from their homes.

So, in 2007 we pursued this new Truth taking an Interfaith Peacebuilders (IFPB) fact-finding trip to Israel and the West Bank. Walking under the cyclone fencing used to keep the settlers garbage from blocking the streets (I was buying a Chupah for my daughter's wedding) I saw the strangulation of Hebron by the Israeli military and Jewish fundamentalist settlers (thieves).



Above: cyclone fencing in Hebron used as a net to catch garbage tossed out of Jewish settlers' homes. Left, Palestinian woman walking near the garbage net. Photos: Steve Bell

We stayed in Bil'in, a community whose orchards and pastures were cut off by the illegal snake-like Wall. We saw farmers unable to get to their lands due to the multilane highway separating them from their olive groves. I came back full of guilt, anger and humiliation that "my people" could be so cruel and resolved to do "something" about it (that chance was soon to come my way).



Fence and highway separating Palestinian farmers from their olive groves. Photo: Steve Bell

In 2010 I went back on a six month Sabbatical sponsored by Berry and Rotary International to work as a psychologist while living and working in Beit Sahour, a suburb of Bethlehem, West Bank. During my time in Beit Sahour I often traveled to West Jerusalem through the "cattle pen"/*machsom*/barrier/checkpoint. In 2012, I returned to Israel-Palestine on another IFPB fact-finding trip with my youngest son.

Currently, we are members of the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Atlanta (UUCA); I taught a class on Israel and Palestine using the a study guide provided through the Unitarian Universalist's for Justice in the Middle East (UUJME); joined Jewish

Voice for Peace and with my wife, and cofounded a UUJME here at UUCA.

As a child, the truth I grew up with was that Israel was "a land without people for a people without a land," a phrase coined by a Christian clergyman, in 1843. My truth changed after five weeks in the West Bank and Israel in the summer of 2007. My new truth was" Israel was a thief—stealing land while systematically boxing in an indigenous people. My truth morphed again, becoming more balanced after four months in the West Bank as I learned new information, e.g., Jordan allowed no universities [when the West Bank was under Jordanian occupation] whereas Israel allowed seven. I saw a collection of 4,000 fired rockets and I stood in the bomb shelters in the Israeli city of Siderot.



Spent rockets in Israel.

The West Bank meets the “low-income” criteria according to the World Bank (2006). The Gross National Income (GNI) of the United States was \$44,710, compared to the World GNI of \$7,448, with the West Bank (and Gaza) having a GNI of \$1,230. Complicating existing poverty was a lack of resources taken for granted in the USA. Infuriatingly, in the West Bank, there are many egregious, de-developing forces insidiously and systematically at work: a 60+ year military occupation blocking free movement in a multitude of ways within the country (three military road blocks between Bethlehem and Jericho), interfaith religious tension, and a government based on tribal rather than democratic principles and, of course, piled on—a drought for the cistern dependent Palestinians.

While in the Occupied Territories, I helped create life skills center for Moderately Intellectually Disabled (MOID) adults (Al Malatha). On the weekends, I consulted at an East Arab Jerusalem pediatric clinic with autistic children with language delays. I helped write the curriculum, lectured and created an internship program for the first Master’s Degree in Special Education at Hebron and Ber Zeit Universities.

It is true from a Western perspective that the land was unoccupied and undeveloped prior to the current construction; it is also true that both Jewish and Arab landholders (80%) were compensated for the land. The Jewish settlement of Har Homa with a population of over 25,000 was carved out of one of the last forested hilltops in the West Bank. It is a microcosm of a large part of the Palestinian anger with Israel. During my six months living Beit Sahour, while listening to the incessant hammering and drilling from the settlement construction, my Christian host, Farah, would tell of his childhood, spending afternoons playing and hunting in the heavily forested hillside. His concept of common ownership conflicts with the legal Western concept of specific owners. In the photo at left below is Har Homa today, and in the photo at right below is the view and the memory of Farah. Palestinians are barred from entering this illegal settlement as Israelis are barred from entering the Palestinian West Bank.



Left: Israeli settlement of Har Homa today. Right: Palestinian land on which Har Homa was built.

In many ways Israel has been a good neighbor: opening medical centers and allowing the

development of universities, to name a few. I believe Israel has

some reasons to be wary. Quoting Rabbi Alan Lew (2003, p. 49), “Israel was attacked first, in 1948, 1967, 1973 and in each of the recent Intifadas. They want acknowledgement that they only took the lands from which they were attacked during these conflicts, and offered to return them on one and only one condition—the acknowledgement of their right to exist. And they want acknowledgement that there are many in the Palestinian camp who truly wish to destroy them, who have used the language of peace as a ploy to buy time until they have the capacity to liquidate Israel . . . once and for all. They want acknowledgement that they have suffered immensely from terrorism, that a people who lost six million innocents scarcely 70 years ago should not have had to endure the murder of its innocent men, women and children so soon again. And they want acknowledgement that in spite of all this, they stood at Camp David prepared to offer the Palestinians everything they claimed to have wanted—full statehood, a capital in East Jerusalem—and the response of the Palestinians was the second Intifada, a murderous campaign of terror and suicide bombings.”

Neither Fatah nor Hamas always have the People’s best interests at heart. The Palestinians would like the world to acknowledge that they lived in the land now called Israel for centuries that they planted olive trees, shepherded flocks, and raised families there for hundreds of years. They would like the world to acknowledge that when they look up from

their villages, their trees and their flowers, their fields and their flocks, they see the horrific, uninvited monolith of western culture—immense apartment complexes, shopping centers and industrial plants on the once-bare and rocky hills where the voice of God could be heard and where Muhammad ascended to heaven. And they would like the world to acknowledge that it was essentially a European problem that was plopped into their laps at the end of the last Great War, not of their own making. And they would like the world to acknowledge that there has always been a kind of arrogance attached to this problem, that it was as if the United States and England told them: Here are the Jews, get used to them. And they would like the world to acknowledge that it has been a great indignity, not to mention a significant hardship, to have been an occupied people for so long, to have to submit to strip searches on the way to work, and intimidation on the way to the grocery store, and the constant humiliation of being subject—a humiliation rendered nearly bottomless when Israel, with the benefit of the considerable intellectual and economic resources of world Jewry, made the desert bloom, in a way that had never been able to do. And they would like the world to acknowledge that there are those in Israel who are determined never to grant them independence, who have used language of peace as a ploy to fill the West Bank with settlement after settlement until the facts on the ground are such that an independent Palestinian state on the West Bank is an impossibility. They would like the world to acknowledge that there is no such thing as a gentle occupation—that occupation corrodes the humanity of the occupier and makes the occupied vulnerable to brutality. An occupation in violation of international law.



Waking up to Shatter the Silence

By Hanan Watson, UU of Palestinian Heritage, All Souls UU, NYC; written in 2011

Winner of UUJME's 2011 Sermon Contest

We all know a lot about the Middle East. Right? Particularly about Palestine and Israel, which are so often in the news. But do we? We get our news through newspapers, radio and television and we UUs are likely to pride ourselves on getting more of our news from the New York Times rather than the New York Post. We watch CNN rather than Fox News, and we most certainly listen to NPR.

Yet how informed are we really? Of course we get news reports. In fact we may be inundated with news by the 24-hour networks. I'm here to add a human face to the stories we hear. I will also offer my reflections on why many of us UUs, who are ready to speak out and act against so many injustices around the world, have been mostly

mum on the subject of Palestine and Israel. I will be prodding you to overcome this reluctance to speak out so that we can contribute meaningfully to the cause of peace and justice for Israelis and Palestinians.

I was raised an Anglican and have been a UU for the last 10 years. In retrospect, I know that I have always been a UU, but with the wrong label. I greatly value our principles and our action-oriented community. Unitarians and Universalists have been on the forefront of recognizing abuses and working diligently for human rights—from abolition of slavery in the 19th century to the civil rights movement of the 1960's to today's gay rights. In the 1930's, we recognized and condemned the abuses perpetrated on the Jews in Europe.

A number of Jews, many of them children, owed their lives to Martha and Waitstill Sharp, two Unitarian activists who rescued them from the impending Holocaust. It's in light of this history that I'm here today to engage you in a discussion that may liberate us from the bonds of silence and make it possible for us to help untangle a riddle where seeds of hatred have been planted and winds of animosity are gusting on both sides.

To help you understand where I'm coming from, I'd like to share with you a segment of the imaginative and hopeful poem "Jerusalem", which I closely identify with. Written by the Palestinian-American poet Naomi Shihab Nye, a segment of the poem reads:

“There’s a place in this brain
where hate won’t grow.
I touch its riddle; wind, and seeds.
Something pokes us as we sleep.
It’s late but everything comes next.”

Yes, I think it is late, but everything must come next.

First, let me tell you my story: I was born in Palestine, in Jerusalem in 1943. My sister and I are the children of Palestinian Arab educators. I have some vivid, though disconnected, memories of the first five years of my life in Jerusalem. We lived in an apartment in the heart of the city with a balcony where we had a sandbox and a pan of water to rinse off before we reentered the bedroom. I remember the sweet smell of my dad’s tobacco as he smoked his pipe, while sitting on his special chair. I remember the burn marks that pitted the armrests of the chair.

Our home was always open. There was an endless stream of people coming and going. Bright, passionate people, both Arabs and Jews, would flow through our living room and the talk was always of philosophy, politics, psychology and religion—way over my head.

In 1948, when I was 5, the State of Israel was founded. That’s when the talk in my home began to take a very frightening turn. Believing that I was too engrossed in my playthings to hear, my parents and their friends would talk of horrifying events happening all around us.

There was the bloody massacre of some 300 Palestinians in the nearby village of Deir Yassin, which was used as an example of what would happen to Palestinian resisters. Friends in my living room reported events like explosions in Jerusalem. They described limbs flying through the air. I knew it was true. I heard the booms outside our building. I saw the flyers covering the streets that said, “Remember Deir Yassin.”

Then one day my parents suddenly announced that we had to leave—immediately. We had to act fast. I watched as a few possessions were hastily rolled into a small rug, and we left as my sister and I sobbed. I can remember pleading for a basket, a small wicker basket that we kept in our china cabinet. I desperately wanted it for the trip. My mom said we couldn’t take it and off we ran.

We were wrenched away. From the normalcy of life. Possessions. Friends. School. Neighborhood walks. A sandbox. Wrenched from all that was precious to us. My memory of the days and weeks that followed is a chaotic blur of moving around. My family eventually settled in Jordan where my parents found teaching positions at a boys’ school. Over the next 3 years, our family of 4 lived at this boys’ school, in one room, with curtain dividers and a common bathroom down the hall. My life was defined by deprivation, anxiety and eating disorders.

Fast forward. As a college student at the American University of Beirut, majoring in history, I learned a lot about nations conquering nations, bombings and land invasions, but missing from these stories were the people. Never did we ever touch on how people’s lives were destroyed by each war and especially how children were repeatedly yanked away from the safety of their loving homes into deprivation, fear, hunger, death or mutilation.

Glaringly missing from my education was the Holocaust, which I learned about only after I arrived in New York City at the age of 22! How quickly I identified, particularly with the children who were uprooted from the safety of their homes and dragged to unknown and horrible destinations. As an adult, I couldn’t believe that I was ignorant of such a major criminal world event.



Hanan as a child with her mother and older sister, Nawal, on the rooftop of their home in Jerusalem, before the Nakba.

I had a lot of learning to do. I read a lot, but more importantly, I participated in the Dialogue Project where I openly listened to Israelis, American Jews, Christians and Muslims, thus gaining insight into their beliefs, which stemmed from their experiences. I have also talked informally with many people who have a different perspective from mine.

My conversations led me to Jacob—a 73-year-old ardent American Zionist with whom I've had many discussions. Jacob, not his real name, explained to me how and why he came to his convictions. When he was 5 years old, his family moved to a suburb of Chicago, which was heavily Christian. In Kindergarten, the kids figured out that he was Jewish and began to taunt him. He remembers being knocked down by a bigger boy, who then rode on his chest and screamed: "You killed Jesus! You killed Jesus!" while other children watched.

Jacob didn't understand what was happening or who Jesus was. Once he was freed, he ran home and asked his parents whether they had killed someone called Jesus. He was bullied regularly for being Jewish until he turned 12.

Israel was established in 1948 when Jacob was 11. Having been abused for being Jewish, he totally identified with Israel as the place of his salvation. Today, a highly accomplished man, liberal in his politics, and critical of many US policies, he is unable to be equally critical of Israel. He assesses everything through the lens of a small country surrounded by hordes of hostile Arabs. Jacob's story, like mine, highlights the power of individual experience in shaping one's emotional response to Palestine and Israel. However, mine illustrates the need to shed one's preconceived notions and open one's mind to an unfamiliar narrative.

I invite you to free yourselves of any preconceived notions you may have and take this journey with me. What I wonder—and ask you to think about, along with me, today—is this: Will our children and grandchildren be proud of our positions and actions vis-à-vis Palestine and Israel? When they ask us what we did to protest the occupation, what will we say? What will be our legacy regarding the suffering of the children of Palestine and Israel? Let's look at the impediments, yours and mine, that may be contributing to our silence.

Stanley Cohen, a Jewish South African criminologist who helped found the first human rights organization in Israel in the 1980's, examines in his book *States of Denial* how people in a community deny, avoid, and reject legitimate information if it threatens that community's sense of comfort and safety. If you deny that a situation exists, you can justify not speaking up or acting; you can safely—and complacently—be a bystander.

Petruska Clarkson, a South African clinical psychologist, in her book *The Bystander*, outlines the many ways people justify their bystanding. Here are a few: It's none of my business. I don't want to take sides.

The truth lies somewhere in the middle. I don't want to raise a difficult issue. It's more complex than it seems; who knows anyway what's happening? My contribution won't make much difference.

Yes, bystanding is the path of least resistance, but if we understand the truth about the situation, I'm confident that as people of faith, we will spring into action. Our faith and history doesn't allow us to do otherwise.

Not only does our UU faith compel us to take action, the Jewish faith itself does the same. In the absence of a constitution, Israel's Declaration of Independence stands as the main governing document in Israel. Consistent with Jewish values, it says: "The State of Israel will be based on freedom, justice and peace. It will ensure complete equality of social and political rights to all its inhabitants irrespective of religion, race or sex."

How far from this declaration it has come! While bystanding seems benign, it is not. By failing to take a stand in support of justice and human rights, we actively support the cruel reality on the ground, which has destroyed the souls of Israelis as well as Palestinians. The Israeli occupation of the West Bank has lasted 44 years. Over the years, in order to subjugate 2.5 million people in the West Bank and 1.6 million in the Gaza Strip, Israeli policies have grown increasingly harsh and militant.

Violence erupts frequently, sometimes initiated by Palestinians and other times by the Israeli military or the Jewish settlers. So, who are the settlers? They are Israelis who have built towns on Palestinian land inside the West Bank. Some of the most militant settlers are foreign-born.

The most egregious example of these was Baruch Goldstein, an American-born Jewish-Israeli physician who, in 1994, opened fire on unarmed Palestinian Muslims praying inside the Mosque of Abraham in Hebron in the West Bank, killing 29 Muslims and wounding another 125. Currently, there are 120 such settlements that Israel considers legal and the international community considers illegal. Additionally, some 100 outposts exist, which are considered illegal even by the Israeli government. The number of Jewish settlers living in the West Bank is estimated to be more than 300,000 people.

Now, try to imagine life in these settlements and around them. When settlers need to go to another area for work, school or medical care, they travel on roads built specifically for them. When Palestinians need to travel, they're not allowed to use these roads and have to go through checkpoints manned by the Israeli army. Stories abound of women in labor giving birth in cars, and emergency medical conditions not promptly treated as Palestinians wait for hours at these checkpoints.

You've heard of the separation barrier, which Israel claims to be constructing purely for security reasons. When you think about this barrier, you may conjure up an image of the iron curtain, but you would be wrong. You may also think that it's being built on the 1967 borders, which are the foundation of all the peace talks. Wrong again! In fact, in some areas, the Israeli military, which is financed by US aid, using Caterpillar tractors, prepares the path for the barrier by snaking through Palestinian towns and villages and destroying homes and olive trees along the way. Neighbor is separated from neighbor, families from children, and residents from their workplace and from medical facilities.

The Gaza Strip, which is a separate enclave from the West Bank, is no longer occupied. However, Israel continues to have total control of what goes in and out of Gaza. Some describe it as the largest prison in the world, with 1.6 million people crowded in an area the size of Philadelphia, with almost no access to the outside world. The people of Gaza are denied necessary supplies by the Israelis and struggle with a scarcity of water, power and building supplies that are necessary to repair the damaged homes, hospitals, and factories resulting from the air and land invasion of Gaza in 2008. This population, consisting mostly of children, drinks and bathes in water that does not meet World Health Organization standards.

Why then—in the face of these abuses and violations—do we remain asleep? Why are we UUs silent? Why do we not, to refer back to Nye's poem, feel something poking us and arouse ourselves to protest? I have alluded to two reasons already. The first is personal experience that influences our views and the second is denial, which leads to bystanding.

Pondering the problem further, a third reason for our silence emerges and that is the problem of myths. As I have watched the protests sweeping the Arab world, I have been impressed that the press, after an initial knee-jerk reaction of how this instability might affect Israel, has moved forward with presenting the events in their proper context.

They are stories that have nothing to do with Israel. They are the stories of populations rising up against oppressive dictatorships in order to gain freedom, justice and dignity. Yes, freedom, justice and dignity. On the other hand, for decades, the word Palestinian has conjured up the image of a man, with a scarf wrapped across his face, throwing stones. Or, worse yet, a suicide bomber. Such images, taken out of the context of the occupation, have painted almost every Palestinian as an extremist.

The presentation of violent images has disregarded the fact that Palestinians too have been, and continue to struggle. Yes, for freedom, justice, and dignity. My time constraints don't allow me to go deeply into this subject. Just keep in mind that myths abound because stories are told out of context; the many peacemakers, both Israelis and Palestinians are omitted from the news; and a growing Palestinian and Israeli joint, peaceful resistance movement gets practically no attention.

To learn more about these omissions, I recommend that you visit the web site of Just Vision, an organization I serve on the board of. The web site is [justvision.org](http://www.justvision.org) (<http://www.justvision.org/>). In this information age, we have many opportunities to find out the truth, but we have to search for it, sort through it, and determine its reliability. We must be informed so that we can speak. I'm convinced that if UUs only knew, we would wake up and shatter the silence.

The fourth and last reason for our silence is Fear. Most insidious is the fear that if one criticizes or finds fault with Israel one would be labeled anti-Semitic. In an article in the *New York Review of Books*, in June 2010, Peter Beinart, an Associate Professor of Journalism and Political Science at the City University of New York, wrote: "Not only does the organized

American Jewish community mostly avoid public criticism of the Israeli government, it tries to prevent others from leveling such criticism as well.” He adds: “In recent years, American Jewish organizations have waged a campaign to discredit the world’s most respected international human rights groups.”

Such campaigns, by conflating criticism of Israeli government policies with anti-Semitism, have created an intimidating environment. This is most evident in educational institutions, where some academicians have suffered career setbacks because they went against the mainstream and told the truth about the situation.

The fear is legitimate and the consequences may be real, but when did this stop UUs from speaking truth to power? We UUs pride ourselves on our active, inquiring minds, on our willingness to receive new information that may contradict past, comfortable assumptions.

I urge each and every one of you to seek information with an open mind. I urge you to dig deep into your heart to understand what keeps you silent. Is it lack of knowledge? Is it some personal experiences you’ve had? Is it denial? Is it fear?

As UUs, we must have the goal of taking appropriate action to support the freedom and dignity of every Palestinian and of every Israeli. By gaining insight into the reasons for our reluctance to speak out, we will begin to shatter the silence. So, what comes next? Education comes next. Witness comes next. Compassion comes next. Healing comes next. Restoring innocence comes next. Peace comes next.

Yes, it’s late, but everything comes next. Amen.



Susan Lawrence at Ramallah Cultural Palace in the occupied Palestinian West Bank territory in 2009

Letter to Hanan Watson

By Susan Lawrence, UU of Jewish Heritage, All Souls UU, NYC, 2015

Note: Susan Lawrence’s essay, “Letter to Hanan Watson,” may not be copied or distributed apart from this study guide.

Dear Hanan,

I began attending All Souls around 2011 and was not aware of your remarkable sermon, “Waking up to Shatter the Silence.” I now have read it many times because it is so thought-provoking. I think my personal awakening underscores much of your concept of shattering the silence.

Unlike being suddenly wrenched out of a secure environment as you were, my childhood

was uneventful. I grew up in Yonkers in the early 1940s surrounded by my father’s family, where the Hungarian and German Jewish families seemed to have quickly assimilated. Think “Hello Dolly.” No one spoke Yiddish, though I heard some Hungarian as a child. We never went into a synagogue and we gathered together for ecumenical holiday dinners at Christmas, Easter and Passover. On Passover we passed out little books to read about the holiday’s significance, but never got past the first few pages before everyone got hungry and abandoned the Seder ritual in favor of dinner.

Without religious training, everything I knew about being Jewish I learned from other teenagers and from my love of books. My story tells of my journey from pro-Israeli to peace activist to pro-Palestinian.

I was seven in 1948 when Israel became a state and have no memories of that event. But in 1958, when I was 16, I was asked to help narrate a program at the Jewish Community Center celebrating the tenth anniversary of the founding of the state of Israel. I remember thinking how ludicrous it was that they wanted me, the most unschooled of Jewish kids to narrate. But I remember the pride I felt during rehearsals when I found out that in 1948 the small new nation of Israel defeated and drove back all the surrounding Arab nations including all the local Palestinians who had voluntarily left their

family homes. I learned that the Arabs were all planning to join together, come back into Israel, slaughter all the Jews and take back the land. Imagine!

Well that massacre didn't happen! I was so proud. The Israelis were fighters!

I first learned about the Holocaust in my late teens as well and I was stunned. I don't recall being taught about this horrific event in school. During the Adolph Eichmann Nazi trial in Jerusalem in the 1960s, I witnessed how survivor parents of a friend sat in front of the television set all day, every day scanning the audience, hoping to see anyone they once knew who had also survived the camps.

Over the next years I began to read much on the Holocaust and just couldn't understand why people wanted to kill Jews for no reason that I could discern. I was told that some people thought Jews had all the money, but you wouldn't know it by my family. Some actually thought that Jews used the blood of Christian babies for their rituals. Gross!

One thing was clear to me: Christians and Arabs had many horrible beliefs about Jews. Hatred could easily spring up again. I began to think of Israel as a safe haven or fallback position if ever there were more pogroms or forced inquisitions or Holocausts or whatever came next. But like most American Jews, I wasn't a Zionist. Let the Israeli Jews stay over there and the American Jews remain here...unless of course it got bad here. But clearly to me and all the Jews I knew, it was imperative to our own survival that this new little nation prevail.

My Christian husband and I decided to entirely skip religion in the upbringing of our two sons. Nevertheless I still felt pride in Israel's defensive prowess. Newscasts during the late 1960s through the 1980s were filled with fighting between the Israelis and the Arabs. I remember hearing my youngest son (about 4 or 5) tell the older one (maybe 8): "Don't go inside, Matt. Mommy's crying in front of the television again. They must be fighting in Israel."

The boys knew nothing of Judaism or the Holocaust, but they knew that I cared about a place called Israel. And I would tell them the only thing I knew about Jewish Law: that they were legally Jewish by virtue of their mother's bloodline; Jewish, for better or for worse. And the most important part: they were protected; as children of a Jewish mother, they had "the right of return." The right to go live in Israel if things got bad again for Jews.

I was born in 1941 when six million Jews were exterminated in the Holocaust, so a safe place seemed like a necessity to me. But over the years, something had changed. My sons had married non-Jewish women, so their wives and my grandchildren did not have that "right of return" protection. And, frankly, younger people today just didn't seem to care. Apparently Israel had lost its relevance to them.

I first went to Israel in 1985 as a tourist. My Israeli guide was a woman who fought in the war for statehood and had much to say about Arab terrorism and duplicity. It became my personal experience. I believed it all and I was still proud of little Israel standing up to the Arabs.

Later I started hearing about atrocities perpetrated upon Palestinians during the almost 50 years of military occupation: illegal land grabs, apartheid, human rights abuses, racism and persecution. Yet in discussions with older American Jews there was almost total denial. They believed that the Palestinians deserved such harsh treatment in retaliation for sending suicide bombers and lobbing bombs across the borders; Jews were within their rights to protect themselves, they said. And I asked, don't Palestinians have the right to protest the occupation of their country? They just didn't want to hear it. You're right, Hanan. Total denial!

Personally, I was at odds as well, knowing how Hamas and the people of Gaza feel about the Jews. Not just how they feel about Zionist Jews. All Jews. The Hamas Charter says it all. They want me dead. Hunted down and killed. That kind of dead!

But it was the Israeli prohibition of chocolate for the children of Gaza that really got to me. Like you, I was haunted by the effect of war on children. In 2007 Israel instituted a blockade and forbade the import of many items into Gaza. For



Susan as a child

instance, along with concrete, metals and other building materials, chocolate, crayons and musical instruments were also forbidden. Come on, chocolate? There can be no reason to deny chocolate than to demonstrate total control over a captive population and to deprive even the children of something nice. I was incensed by the arbitrary restriction on chocolate. I believe in the first UU Principle: “the inherent worth and dignity of every person.” So when the opportunity arose I went to see and witness for myself.



Susan Lawrence, second from right in red and white shirt, with bike group

In 2009, almost 25 years after my first visit, I went as an activist for peace. I traveled through Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and the West Bank on a bicycle tour with a group of women from 40 different countries to raise awareness of the plight of the women and, of course, the children throughout the war-torn Middle East.

I saw for myself the immense separation wall, the illegal settlements on Palestinian land, uprooted olive trees, teargas canisters being flung at me by people from the illegal settlements, the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps and the despair. I was rethinking my position. I understood that I was directed toward witnessing these atrocities for propaganda purposes, but I was still shocked.

In the Shatila camp I saw posters with Ariel Sharon labeled as a terrorist and PLO leader Yasser Arafat as a freedom fighter. Of course I had always thought it was the other way around. (One man’s freedom fighter is another man’s terrorist.) One set of posters had descriptions and photos of the 1982 massacre of

relatively unarmed Palestinian and Lebanese Shiite refugees locked in the camps like sitting ducks, while Sharon allowed their armed enemies to enter and slaughter them. Really? A defenseless civilian population locked in the camp and slaughtered?



Poster at Sabra and Shatila refugee camp plaza in Lebanon labeling Ariel Sharon as a terrorist.

I first heard the Arabic word “Nakba,” the 1948 tragedy, referring to how the Palestinians were driven from their homes and villages, forced into exile in refugee camps and not allowed back. So that meant that they didn’t leave voluntarily? Can this be true?

I returned home a changed woman. I first went to the Middle East as a tourist. I went the second time as a peace activist. And now, to my surprise, I am a UU woman of Hebrew Heritage who is now pro-Palestinian. So much to learn, so much to re-learn and eager to make a difference.

Several times a week I have lunch in a communal lunch room, often sitting with the same large group of people. One man, an American Zionist, has prison camp numbers tattooed on his arm. When he heard me say I rode my bike into the West Bank he became totally agitated, almost screaming at me that “there is no such place as the West Bank.” He insisted that the area in question is and was always called “Judea and Samaria.” At one point he called me an anti-Semite and a Nazi as he stormed out. The last thing I wanted to do was upset this gentle concentration camp survivor. It was devastating.

I realize that what the Nazis did to the Jews was unconscionable. We can’t change that. What the Israelis, many of them the children and grandchildren of Holocaust survivors, are now doing to the Palestinians is also unconscionable. But we can try to change that. We must change that.

Today I shudder as Europe begins to publicly hate Jews all over again. In Iran they are again reading the infamous hoax “The Protocols of the Elders of Zion,” where it is said that Jews use Christian blood in their rituals. The Ayatollah Khamenei calls us subhuman rabid dogs.

I went to hear PLO President Mahmoud Abbas speak in New York and I’ve signed petitions. Yet today I hear Bibi Netanyahu announce after his fourth-term election that he will not allow a Palestinian state to be formed on his watch.

After so many years of pretend negotiations, he now admits that he will never give back any of the Palestinian land his country has stolen.

And then I came across the Israeli Declaration of Independence, which sounds exactly like our sixth UU principle which is: “The goal of world community with peace, liberty and justice for all.” The Israeli Declaration says that “The state of Israel will be based on freedom, justice and peace. It will ensure complete equality of social and political rights to all its inhabitants irrespective of religion, race or sex.” I guess Bibi hasn’t read that in a while.

Today I read anti Zionist articles in the *New York Times*... the pro-Israeli *Times*? Before this, if I wanted to know what was really happening in the Middle East I had to go to Al Jazeera or the BBC.

Will petitions and our call for justice result in change tomorrow? I don't know. But I do believe in our second UU principle: “justice, equality and compassion in human relations” and feel we must make our voices heard. I absolutely know that imprisoning and subjugating a race of people in the largest open-air prison camp in the world is a violation of the spirit and law established by those who founded the nation I once admired so much.

Palestinians and Israeli Arabs need healing; they deserve justice, equality and compassion... even as some of them need to be taught to offer the same to the Jews. Even if some of them are the people who want me dead.

You ask us to consider whether our children and grandchildren will be proud of our positions and actions regarding the Palestine/Israel situation. I think I've done a lot, but there's a lot more to do. You've listed the next steps: education, witness, compassion, healing, restoring innocence and peace. And so my support for the rights and equal treatment of Palestinians is something I need to say out loud...over and over again.

Thank you for your wonderful sermon. I am proud to be your friend.

Opening Reading: Elaboration on the 3rd Principle

“Spiritual growth isn’t about a vertical ascent to heaven but about growth in every dimension at once. It’s spirituality in 3-D. Growth in spirit doesn’t measure one’s proximity to a God above, but rather the spaciousness of one’s own soul—its volume, its capacity, its size.

“We need souls that can take in the world in all its complexity and diversity, yet still maintain our integrity. And we need souls that can love and be in relationship with all of this complexity. Instead of fight or flight, we need a spiritual posture of embrace.”

—Rev. Rob Hardies, All Souls Church Unitarian, Washington, DC (read more from Rob in *The Seven Principles in Word and Worship*, ed. Ellen Brandenburg).

Grounding Questions and Discussion

1. How can UUs covenant to spiritual growth on discussing Israel-Palestine?
2. What are examples of the traditional role of covenants in UU discourse, in small group ministry and action?
3. How does our UU faith tradition speak to the complexity and diversity of this issue and ways to address it?
4. What are Abrahamic sources of UU history?
5. In what ways can the UU experience in development of Welcoming Congregations inform the welcoming of discussion of Israel-Palestine?
6. What would a meaningful “spiritual posture of embrace” look like?
7. Address discussion of fight or flight responses that prevent embrace of complex issues.

Activities

Develop a Covenant. Read aloud together the “Guidelines for Dialogue.” Develop a written covenant for how the group is going to be together during the study sessions.

Power Shuffle

Explain that the group will be participating in an activity to practice being in covenant despite differences. Have everyone stand and move to one side of the room. Explain that you will be reading a series of questions, and they are standing on the “No” side of the room. They are to listen to the question and silently answer it. If their answer to a question is “Yes,” they should move to the other side of the room. If their answer is undecided or they want to abstain, they should move to the middle. Allow time for people to look around the room after each shuffle. Choose a subset of the questions if desired.

Have you ever eaten hummus?

Are you a lifelong UU?

Does discussing Israel or Palestine evoke strong emotion in you?

Are you of Christian heritage?

Are you of Jewish heritage?

Are you of Muslim heritage?

Are you of Hindu heritage?

Are you of Buddhist heritage?

Are you a pagan?

Are you a humanist?

Can you find Israel and Palestine on a map?

Are you of Arab heritage?

Are you of Palestinian heritage?

Were your relatives harmed in the Holocaust?

Were your relatives harmed in the creation of Israel?

Do you have Israeli friends or colleagues?

Do you have Palestinian friends or colleagues?

Do the Jewish people need their own state?

Do Palestinians need their own state?

Should the territories be combined in one state?

Has this conflict been going on for centuries?

Is this conflict very complicated to understand?

Are you well-informed about this conflict?

Have you felt grief about the conflict this summer?

Is this conflict ever going to be solved?

Has the UUA addressed the conflict satisfactorily?

Have you ever eaten matzoh?

Ask everyone to return to their seats. Go around the circle allowing people 30-60 seconds to share their reactions to the exercise. Source: booklet of youth games for community-building,

<https://www.uua.org/documents/youthoffice/deepfun.pdf>

Sharing Awareness Stories. Each person can share when they first became aware of any aspect of the Israel-Palestine conflict.

Video, Conflict in Israel and Palestine: Crash Course, <http://youtu.be/lwo2TLIMhiw> . View the video together and discuss it.

Reading. The facilitator and volunteers can read aloud [Loving the Contradictions](http://www.uuworld.org/ideas/articles/23672.shtml) (<http://www.uuworld.org/ideas/articles/23672.shtml>) from *UU World/The Seven Principles in Word and Worship*. Discuss embracing differences and contradictions as a form of spiritual growth.

Discuss the Pre-reading.

Call to Action Ideas. The call to action for this session is simply being willing to engage in deep listening and respectful dialogue, embracing differences and being willing to have an open mind. These practices are the foundation of spiritual and intellectual growth. At home or at the facility where you participated in the session, journal about your impressions and reactions, and your intentions for growing from this study.

Closing

Each person in the group can share what they learned, found most notable, or a question that arose from the session.