

A Statement on the Current Tragic Situation

I write this from Israel where I live. We are in the midst of unprecedented pain and the suffering of unimaginable violence. There is a climate of fear and anger, and loss, which for some is overwhelming. At the same time, our spiritual community and many groups and kind hearted folk are extremely active round the clock, in online events or physical meetings, bringing relief, humanitarian aid, care, the capacity to listen, and offering ways to find the strength and stability to go through this terribly dark period.

At the same time many of us, including myself, cannot condone the suffering inflicted on the Palestinians of Gaza, in response, as if that will be an answer. It will not be. 'An eye for an eye will leave the whole world blind'. The evidence is clear. Every few years there has been an outbreak of violence, Gaza has been pounded, and the seeds are sown for the next round. These days it is by far the worst. It still expresses the utter failure year by year for both sides to explore other options. When the voices on both sides say that there are no other options, it expresses only the paths that were not taken. It is sleepwalking into suffering. It shows aggressive and reactive responses based on trauma, rather than wise actions that create conditions for change.

Over many years, I and colleagues have been bringing groups of Israelis to the West Bank to spend a weekend on peace-making workshops with Palestinians, at times when the dominant voices said that peace was impossible and only violence and suppression worked. We found that our tools of deep listening, sharing our pain and daily life experiences, and being in each other's shoes, created a lasting bond and showed all of us that peace was possible. The truth of our shared vulnerability creates an opportunity for transformation. We also did a large number of quiet peace walks throughout the region, Israelis and Palestinians, Jews and Arabs, demonstrating what peacefulness was like at times when it was forgotten. Did it make a difference? Yes, like a candle, that brings a small light yet one that can make a real difference in a totally dark room.

What can you and others who are outside the region do to help? Kindness is the opposite of hate and violence. Connect with the compassion in your hearts, and know that compassion is unlimited. It does not have one address. Radiate compassion for all sides and for ourselves, as we too are vulnerable beings. And let it work through us and feed actions out in the world, wherever we have an opportunity.

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