

Israel Palestine Threshing Session May 17th

Friends spoke about their thoughts and feelings based on the previous small group discussion:

- It seems as though there is a need to highlight the culpability of the American government in maintaining and continuing the problem.
- We had the term compassionate listening come forward as a very important tool for both sides
- My question from the beginning is why do we own this “situation,” when we don’t own others? We all know about the Holocaust, I’m very aware that each one of us who has European Christian ancestors has the following ancestry: Jews lived in Christian communities and from time to time over the years, Christians massacred and persecuted Jews. I don’t think the history gets out of your genes...We don’t have a lot of moral superiority vis a vis the people of Israel. We helped create this horrible situation, and we can’t just turn it away by being mad at them.
- I think about what’s happened to the political process here and in Israel, where the fear mongers scare everyone into voting for them...any leader who plays the system for power is unlikely to get us to peace. That history is all part of this; it’s thousands of years of anti-Semitism. But then take a Palestinian thirty year old, they’ve lived in occupation, they aren’t free and you take that person and have someone play on their fears as well. The path that I can see is person to person. I think individuals want peace; they know that living in this perpetual conflict isn’t a way to raise children. Forget the leaders, but I can see the examples of grassroots change coming from the people both here and in Israel/Palestine.

What is it that we feel called to do as a meeting?:

- There is a real need to avoid irony. I say this based on my experience of being in Israel, and of being an Israeli. There is a profound sense of hypocrisy when groups that shared in the creation of the problem are the ones who are singling out Israel for condemnation
- I think the Israeli government has acted badly and we should understand that but I also know that the Israeli political system is very finely balanced. We want to put on pressure that helps us but we don’t want to delegitimize Israel because that supports the right.
- I want to ask everyone if at some point in your life you’ve had an opinion that you held strongly and were convicted about it. You held it for a significant period of time until you suddenly didn’t have it anymore and had a different conviction. How did that change occur? Some of it is by saying I’m willing to think, some might be by listening to others, some might be by listening to God’s will. I believe that bad opinions can be changed. They are changed by including and being inclusive about what one expresses as a community. I ask all of you to think back on this

meeting's experience in writing minutes (specifically the Gulf War). That Minute ultimately focused only on needing to talk and communicate with one another. Let's get rid of 90% of what we're writing about and let's concentrate on what we can say tomorrow. And if that is nothing more than we believe people ought to talk to one another, then so be it.

- Speaking of silly ideas: I wonder if there should not be a Jewish state, the idea of two states should be dropped and every Jew and every Arab should be a citizen?
- I don't feel a way forward politically speaking, as it feels like we're wasting our breath with that. However, I believe that whatever we can do on a grassroots level to relieve suffering, to create mutual empathy, to give folks tools to cooperate. Anything we can do to promote intra-visitation, understanding, educational efforts, and feels like the way forward.
- I've sensed an avoidance of this issue, avoidance of reconciliation, avoidance of engagement. I think we're afraid to really engage the issue because we have some many mixed emotions. As a Quaker group I think it's a cop out that this group couldn't come up with a way forward. We live Israel/Palestine every day in this country, I had to come to these sessions to become aware that there is an active non-violent approach in Palestine. Whenever Israeli's and Palestinians come together it doesn't get any press in the way forward. We don't see the truly peaceful things. To me the problem is not that complicated. You have two brothers and sisters who don't get along. The Jews deserve a homeland, they suffered in the Holocaust, and for centuries. Yet, there cannot be true joy in an Israeli knowing that there is suffering thirty miles away.
- When things go wrong the thing that we overlook is that there are structures, and they take on a life of their own, and they are populated by individuals and people who then function in a way that is imposed on them.
- Truth and reconciliation process is the only way that has worked –we have nothing to be ashamed of in trying to live with Quaker principles, it's the best way forward

Where we are going? Please note that we're not at an end result here, we're still mid-stream, we hope that there's still creativity out of the process. We need to stay together to work it out between us, in a way of modeling:

- I don't see that change always happens with a leader, I feel like Quakers have a strong history of working as a group that holds so much power to move forward
- I was stunned by the history in this room in relation to this topic. The Quaker organization that I trusted and liked best was AFSC and I was started to hear others say that they are taking a destructive position. I want to be able to able to trust that those activist Quakers are doing what needs to be done.

- Our government is providing all sorts of weapons to the area and that is something that is totally against what the Religious Society of Friends feels is the answer so it feels to me that a starting point of whatever message we craft is that we would like to have our government's role change dramatically. What would happen if our government stopped supplying weapons and began applying diplomacy?
- The pressure from a number of outside sources, and new contexts are being created. The shift in the surrounding countries is dramatic and might provide a place to begin to work for non violent principles. It might be productive to remember to zoom out the lens.
- If we want to act politically here it should be with respect to our own government. We have a responsibility for what our government does. It's hard to figure out how my vote counts, but that illusion is critical. I don't feel that we have the knowledge or standing to tell the Israelis or Palestinians what to do or how to do it. We have our own problems, our personal sins and national bad policies. I would beg Friends to address those and to stop trying to tell others what we think of them, how horrible they've made us feel, and how to solve their problems.
- The most effective communication has a very well identified audience. You learn a lot about your own position when you craft an expression of your position, imagining different audiences. When we think about what we want to do, who we have a right to speak to? Do we have a right to speak from any kind of position? Who do we have a right to speak to? I don't know the answer but it seems small, at first.
- The closest thing we've had to a sense of a meeting is that we should address the American government. The question of who we speak to and who we have a right to speak to are really questions that we haven't looked at in the way that we do. We have a method of how we figure out how we do things but I again imploring people to back off on the power of their opinions. Until then I'm content to appoint some people to figure out what we can say to the American government that we can all support together.
- AFSC has all of its chickens on one side of the road (Ramala Friends Meeting) and seems, at this point, to be focused on that work to the exclusion of discussion with Israelis.

We seem to have agreed that we are addressing American decision makers but it's not clear who those people are or how we might do this. What I haven't heard today is distress or concern that was vocalized after our last meeting, I haven't heard concerns about ways in which we aren't in the same place, I haven't heard whether we are in unity that we move forward with trying to draft something?

- The question really becomes: why should we? We should know both who we are talking to and what we want them to do, to know, to feel that they didn't before?
- I find it hard to think that drafting something to the US government will do anything other than paper someone's wastebasket. I would like to see us move towards finding groups to support

and not only finding groups in Israel/Palestine but also finding groups here. We have a US political process and starts in the voting districts and maybe there is a missive of Quaker of principles and inclusion and listening that we can write, and can use as a message in whatever opportunity each of us are in. It can be a guiding principle that we can say “this is what we stand for.”

- Maybe there is a little call that suggests that we write for ourselves for starters.
- I had not taken in the injustices of the community that I heard here in the first meeting. It felt important to me, that we acknowledge that we have strong feelings here and that we not just rise above them to a calm place. It's there for the taking.

The meeting concluded with a decision that two small groups would be formed to create specific documents. The first group consisting of (Cliff, Michael, Rick, Jim, Alice) would focus on creating a document based on Quaker principles that we might be able to take out to the larger the community. The second group (Minga, Ian, George, Gate) will focus on a document intended for those in positions of authority in US decision making in this conflict.