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## **The Trauma Vortex in Action Again in the Middle East**

The latest breakdown of the peace process in the Middle East has unfortunately set the stage for the Palestinians, the Israelis, and possibly all the Arab world, to be caught again in the reenactment of psychological trauma and its destructive path. There is a small but real possibility that a nuclear war might result from this if we do not stop this breakdown at once. The repetition of this trauma cycle, also called the trauma vortex, has the tendency to take over without much warning and sweep everything and everybody on its path.

Much has been written about understanding the Middle East crisis in the context of history, culture, politics and religion. Nothing has been written about the crisis in the context of psychological trauma, which could explain the seeming intractability of the conflict. Without this understanding, the events and negotiations seem irrational and baffling. Without understanding the role of trauma, there might not be a prospect for a successful peace.

The trauma vortex is a spiraling process. Unresolved trauma becomes immobilized energy in the body. This phenomenon compounds when events occur that rekindle any past unresolved trauma and reopens deep wounds causing a flood of memories of every past injury, insult, humiliation, loss, fear and hatred. There is a hyper-vigilant search for threat and a sense of on-going danger that sets the stage for violent reenactments, with the psychological hope to finally master the deeply wounded and traumatized feelings. The trauma cycle has a life of its own; it is difficult to stop and extremely contagious. It can be compared to a campfire originally made for warmth, but with carelessness turns into a wild forest fire gone out of control, burning thousands of acres and destroying everything in its path. The initial trigger action might have been to just establish rights or defend honor, but its result is overwhelming emotional turmoil and destruction.

Both the Jews and the Palestinians have been thrown into this overwhelming trauma vortex throughout their histories. The cycle of trauma keeps re-igniting because both believe their lives and existence are at stake. The Israelis' existential fear is chronically reawakened when the Arabs declare their intentions to "drive them into the sea." The Palestinians' desperation is perpetuated when their independence is postponed. One group is fighting for its existence; the other is fighting for its national identity and dignity.

I am Jewish from an Arabic country. I have attempted to address the issue of the Israel-Palestinian conflict from as much an objective point of view as I can. I care about peace and about the right of all people to live in freedom and dignity, but clearly, I come from a Jewish

point of view. Lately, I have found myself often caught in the Middle East trauma vortex myself and emotionally could only see the Israeli-Jewish point of view. I am certain that most Palestinians reading this piece would understand what I am saying, as they would understandably take a position more towards the Palestinian side.

I have been keenly aware that when I spiral into the trauma vortex, I feel hurt by the hatred, abandoned, desperate and hopeless, angry and tempted by revenge. Writing this article has been a painstaking ascent out of the trauma vortex that has helped me reconnect with hope. It has helped me with my desire for brotherhood with humanity, and to reopen my heart to Jews/Israelis and Palestinians/Arabs.

I speak of Jews and Israelis because I think the problem involves centuries of Jewish history and not only the land of Israel. I speak of Arabs and the Palestinians because the Middle East problem involves all the Arab countries as well. Furthermore, I find the problem of anti-Semitism inextricably linked with this conflict as it has extrapolated to the UN and the world community.

Similar to my own willingness to reorient my perspective, my hope is that Palestinians will attempt the task of reaching as much objectivity as they can and that my fellow Jews will do the same. We can then engage in dialogue.

When the trauma vortex, or trauma cycle is in control, its effects are powerfully negative:

- It disconnects one person from another, one people from another.
- It disconnects individuals from the totality of their emotions and makes them focus only on trauma-related ones.
- It disconnects individuals, groups and nations from their capacity to reason.
- It disconnects individuals from the ability to manage their internal emotional lives, to keep track of the larger picture, and to control their impulsive actions.
- An extreme polarization of feelings, thoughts and principles occurs which leads to hatred and intolerance at the expense of any previously held moderate positions.
- There is a dimming of the concept of a future and a loss of the capacity to function well in the present.
- The hyper-vigilant search for threat, which sets the stage for reenactment, tramples all opportunities for a renegotiation that can bring real healing.
- Revenge in the form of violence appears to be the only viable reaction, the only available way for seeking justice. Violence brings a temporary relief and a false sense of victory and pride; but the nervous system stays highly activated, compelling people to seek relief through more violence. Any degree of healing doesn't stand a chance because there is never sufficient discharge or completion of the traumatic energy.
- Blaming external enemies, and thoughts like "no one cares" and "they are out to get us," prevail as the dominant reality. All previous efforts at connection and caring are forgotten, dismissed or ignored.

Trauma reenactment affects individuals, families, cultures and nations. It is imperative that we understand what is happening in Israel and Palestine in terms of long standing unresolved trauma. We must immediately bring this understanding to both countries in order to stop the cycle of violence. All involved must not frame this cycle in a language of blame.

The Serbs just awoke from a traumatic hypnotic trance that lasted 14 years. They suffered trauma in World War II when 700,000 Serbs were massacred and others sent to concentration camps. Because it was left unresolved, this trauma was easily re-ignited by the manipulations of an unscrupulous and tormented leader. His state-controlled media displayed for months pictures of World War II massacres, exploiting old fears and hatreds that led to horrendous acts of revenge. Nothing stopped this traumatic reenactment and, today, the Serbs have awakened -14 years too late- scarred psychically, morally and economically for generations to come. They lost land, status and their place among righteous nations. Many thousands of lives were lost on both sides. Lebanon, too, just woke up from its own hypnotic trauma trance that left it, a country that was the paradise of the Middle East, in a shamble of ruins, economic problems and compromised autonomy.

The world community and the media cannot allow opportunistic or disturbed leaders to manipulate our destinies. We must not allow them to compromise our peace by letting them exploit unresolved pre-existing traumas and polarize our differences.

We must clearly spell out the consequences of falling victim to the hypnotic pull of reenacting trauma. What are the solutions available for us to prevent this? The traumas of Israel and Palestine need to be acknowledged. If we want to stop the current cycle, the horrors that both nations have suffered need to be assessed objectively, acknowledged and validated with compassion. Then the work of healing the past traumas must be pursued and embraced fully with all the tools at hand.

To release the cycles of trauma, it is essential that we all understand that cumulatively unresolved trauma is at work in both nations. It is also necessary to look at the following list: not as a laundry list to exacerbate emotions, but as a list of grievances that need to be acknowledged and validated for both sides. For most people, validation of trauma releases us from its negative effects, and offers the possibility to move towards healing.

### **1. The Palestinians and the Arab world experience.**

We can spend years and thousands of pages discussing who is at fault for the present situation of the Palestinians. Is it the Arab countries, Israel, colonialism, the British, or the Holocaust? However, what really needs to be acknowledged and accepted is the Palestinian search for nationhood, independence, and viable economic development. They need to restore a sense of pride in their culture. The United Nations, and all Israelis and Arab countries need to acknowledge and accept these needs as undeniable necessities.

The traumatization of the Palestinians has been fed by many events:

- Palestine and Arab countries have been colonized throughout history.
- The Jews settled in a land that the Palestinians held as their own, resulting in the loss of Palestinian homes and land. The Israelis went along when the misguided Palestinian and Arab leaders led their people into refugee status.
- The Palestinian refugees have been massacred by other Arab countries – Syria, Jordan, Lebanon.
- Palestinian refugees have not been allowed to assimilate and have been made pawns in the Arab world and in the war between the communists and the capitalists. The Arabs have engaged in and lost four wars in the name of the Palestinians. In each war, the Israelis occupied more of their land. The Palestinians have suffered retaliation and loss

of lives. They endured in the beginning of their struggle being seen by the Western world as terrorists.

- In the Palestinian memory are the graphic and indelible traumatic images of the Shatilla massacre by Christian Arabs, of demolished homes and of broken bones by Israelis. Palestinian hopes have been dashed. Palestinians have felt repressed, oppressed, dominated, and treated as second-class people. They are also convinced, being a populous repressed minority that their numbers will prevail eventually.
- Their own leaders have betrayed them. They were given hope with promises impossible to keep, their children taught in school that Israel is not on the map of the Middle East. Many of these children have been reared in poverty and in neglect; they have been schooled in revolution, hatred and sacrifice of their lives. The Israelis and the Palestinian Authority have silenced moderate Palestinian political leaders.
- The development of the Palestinians' economic infrastructure has been stunted by the Arab world and the Palestinian authority and neglected by the Israelis and the rest of the world.
- The Israelis control the water and dominate the ports and the economic resources the Palestinians depend upon.
- There is mounting anger and frustration among the Palestinians for the expansion of Jewish settlements, for border closures, for rough searches by Israeli soldiers at roadblocks and for late-night raids on their homes by Israelis "special units."
- They are revolted that when there are clashes between them, they die in greater number than the Israelis.
- The Palestinians feel hopeless about Israel's intention to facilitate an independent state because they see Israel continuing to encroach upon their territory by allowing more settlements to develop.
- The Palestinians have been exposed to the Israeli standard of living, which raises expectations that have not yet been met. Palestinians have been supported financially by many countries, but mostly for war, conflict and death. Palestinian Diaspora does not have the experience in organizing against oppression and persecution that the Jewish Diaspora has and has not contributed enough money for schools, hospitals, summer camps and religious centers – Arab Israelis, citizens of Israel and in a better political situation, have their own list of grievances – discrimination at all levels; a higher unemployment rate than among Jewish Israelis and racist attitudes held by part of the Jewish population.
- The United Nations consistently sided with the Palestinian cause against Israel and has not helped them accept the need to compromise when negotiating a satisfactory peace. The United Nations' unilateral support of the Palestinians exacerbates Israel's existential fears and does not encourage it to make concessions.
- Men of vision like Anwar Sadat have been assassinated, and the present leaders of Egypt have not taken the opportunity to translate "political peace" into an economical and cultural peace.
- The Arab and Palestinian media have been allowed to present objectively the actions of both Palestinian and Israeli sides, exacerbating the Palestinian trauma vortex.
- Many opportunities that have presented themselves for embracing true peace with Israel have been missed. The cost of these missed opportunities has been the loss of lives, poverty, bitterness and an independence constantly postponed.

## **2. Israel and the Jewish Diaspora experience**

The Jewish experiences of trauma are centuries old. Jews have been a minority discriminated against for two thousand years. They have been oppressed, expelled, raped and massacred over the centuries, without receiving the compassion the world usually feels for the underdog. They have been fighting against prejudice (and sometimes internalizing it) in their host countries where they were stigmatized as greedy, as part of an international conspiring cabal, as evil and as killers of God.

- Jews have suffered pogroms in East Europe and Russia. Russian Jewry is still in peril. Jews are a generation who lost six million in the Holocaust. There is still rabid Christian anti-Semitism stimulating Holocaust deniers. In addition, Jews read of and/or suffer from, the renewal of neo-nazi forces in the world.
- Synagogues and Jewish schools are still being burned in “civilized” European countries. Jews around the world are still wounded and traumatized by the Holocaust and by a world that did not answer their cries for help during the most organized and well-planned genocide in the history of humanity.
- Israelis, like Palestinians, have been pawns in the cold war between the superpowers.
- Jews have been expelled en masse from the Arab countries.
- Even today, parts of the Arab world publicize blatantly its intention to eradicate Israel.
- Jews are facing a United Nations polarized by Christian anti-Semitism and Muslim anti-Israeli sentiment. Some of the Christian world still refuses to see Jerusalem in Jewish hands, even if it led to the desecration of their religious sites and to more difficult access when it was in Arab hands. The battle between the two Testaments continues, albeit in a more subtle way.
- Israel, each time it faces a crisis, feels that it can rely only on itself. It feels abandoned by the world with every resolution the United Nations passes against it. Of the 175 Security Council resolutions passed before 1990, 97 were directed against Israel. Of the 690 General Assembly resolutions voted on before 1990, 429 were directed against Israel. These facts alone reactivate repeatedly the genocidal trauma of the Holocaust. Concentration camp survivors are thinking of packing their bags and running away, as if the Holocaust is happening again, right now.
- The massacre of Palestinian Jews in Hebron in 1929, by Palestinian Arabs, has left indelible traumatic memories in Jews from all over the world.
- Israeli Jews have fought for five wars for survival in their 52 years of existence. If they had lost one battle too many, they would have been annihilated and massacred.
- Israeli Jews do not take the survival of Israel for granted. Jews have lost Israel several times throughout their history. After a thousand years of Jewish ownership, Palestine had been ruled in turn by the Romans, by Islamic or Christian crusaders, by the Ottoman Empire and briefly by the British. It had never since existed as an autonomous entity until the British partitioned the land between Palestinian Arabs and Palestinian Jews in 1948. Albeit a minority, Jewish presence in Palestine never ceased to exist.
- Israelis have suffered repeated suicide bombings and attacks on civilians and on children.
- Israelis know and fear that mob mentality can be easily aroused in the Arab world. They mistakenly think that Palestinians do not place a high value on individual life. They are angry that Palestinians show their discontent by rock throwing, rioting. Israeli soldiers think they are left with an impossible task – the need to control rebellion in their country

- without appearing to be military oppressors. Their steps of self-protection are watched by a world that seems to them only too happy to judge them with much harsher standards.
- Israelis have seen the fabric of their society torn in soul searching because of the violence they have used in a war of attrition with another country and another people. They have been anxious to speak with the Palestinian voices of reason and feel frustrated when these voices are touch and go, in step with the political process between Israelis and Palestinians leaders.
  - They feel that the world media misrepresents the events taking place between them and the Palestinians and keeps them constantly struggling with a hostile world opinion.
  - Israelis are upset that out of a hundred millions refugees since World War II, the Palestinians refugees are the only group that has never been absorbed or integrated. The Arab nations have made a point to not do that, and expect Israel to integrate them at the risk of its own integrity.
  - Israelis feel discouraged and mystified when what they consider as an act of strength, such as unilateral withdrawal from Lebanon, or a strategy- leaving Joseph's Tomb- are interpreted as signs of weakness by the Arabs and seem to trigger additional violence.
  - They are deeply disheartened and incredulous that even America, in its attempt to appease the "Arab street", makes a difference between terrorism against Americans and terrorism against Israelis.
  - The trauma vortex is also active within Israel itself, creating strong polarization and anger among its different factions. Israeli men, forced to sit inactive by the sidelines during the Gulf War could resort to the only survival defense response available to them: the freeze response. They could neither fight nor flee nor defend their women and children, while sitting with their masks on, in underground refuges. The effect of this freeze response and the feelings left un-discharged are most likely responsible for the extreme conflicts manifesting themselves in all sectors of Israeli society. There is, at present, a deep polarization in the Israeli and Jewish world between the concepts of discernment and compassion; polarization between the religious Right (intent on territorial gains and security without any regard for the Palestinian reality) and the extreme secular Jewish faction with no religious beliefs and practices intent on helping create a Palestinian State with no regards for the feeling of the need for security the rest of the country has, nor for the emotional readiness of both people.
  - Israelis are torn between the need to give the territories back, and the belief that if they do not keep strategic settlements, they will compromise their ability to defend themselves or to guarantee their water needs. They are particularly preoccupied in letting Jerusalem be surrounded by Palestinian villages, remembering how they had no access to their holy places when they were in Jordanian hands and how costly it was for them to defend Jerusalem from that position.
  - There is serious conflict between Israelis yearning for acceptance and ready to embrace the smallest evidence of Palestinian cooperation, and those who think they are ignoring the reality of the hostility of Palestinian intentions as the PLO's Charter still calls for the destruction of the State of Israel.
  - Israelis have believed, because of their military capability, that they could ignore the fate of Palestinians. Because for the first nineteen years the Palestinians were under the control of Jordan, the Israelis did not consider themselves responsible for the Palestinian problem, and thus, did not try to fix it. They were misled into thinking that they were

bound to western culture and did not embrace the opportunity to combine eastern and western cultures. They did not, until recently, teach the Arab language and culture to their Jewish Israeli citizens. They have missed the opportunity to belong culturally in the Middle East and be accepted by the Arab world.

- They have also not been aware that they represent western values for a Middle Eastern world that despises these values at the same time, and because, it is seduced by them.

No peace can be negotiated without compassion and openness to consider the dilemmas of both sides clearly and objectively by everybody. Both populations have had their undue share of trauma. Israeli mothers watch with apprehension and dread while their children go into the army, not knowing whether they'll be ambushed, captured and mutilated. Each Israeli citizen wonders when they or their loved ones leave the house, whether they'll return safely. Palestinian mothers watch with apprehension and dread their young go to riot, dreading whether they'll come back alive or not but also sure that that is the only honorable thing for them to do. Palestinian parents despair of being able to give a bright future to their kids. Both share the desire to protect their children's lives and futures which will be seriously compromised if they do not stop the effects of unresolved trauma from engulfing them to the point of unstoppable war.

No real peace will take place unless the recurring traumas are recognized, validated and stopped from being perpetrated. Both trauma cycles need to be interrupted. The cycle of blame must also stop. This can be done by both communities using their resources to emphasize safety, honor, pride, in preserving dignity, economic stability and political viability. There needs to be a major shift in focus from killing each other to thrive together. Both parties need to learn how to empower themselves without holding power over the other.

What global resources can be mobilized?

We need to help them focus on the healing that has already taken place, and we must remind them of the extreme danger if there is no shift away from destruction. We need to remind Israelis and Jews that the world had generally recognized the immeasurable catastrophe the Jews suffered during the Holocaust, and, as atonement, facilitated the birth of the State of Israel in 1948. The U.S. particularly has shown unmistakable support both for the existence of Israel and for the eradication of anti-Semitism. Every year, some Head of State - such as Spain, France and the Vatican - has apologized for his country's guilt of perpetration upon the Jews.

As different from the past, Jews today can be and are vocal about their rights and their needs for security. They now challenge and openly fight anti-Semitism wherever it exists.

The Palestinians started their modern history, like many people, colonized and without a modern nation state and had been considered pariahs. They need to acknowledge that they are now recognized as a people possessing a separate and legitimate cultural identity, and having a right to be independent in their own land.

They have to recognize that they have been unilaterally supported by the Soviet Union, the Arab World, the majority of the Asian and African nations, and unconditionally by the UN.

Even the U.S., presented as a special friend to Israel, recognizes the Palestinians' rights and is helping them negotiate for their needs. The Palestinians must recognize that they have to engage in negotiations from a different platform than the one used 20 years ago.

Both nations need to respect that all people seek religious freedom. Both nations need to embrace their common ground: linguistic roots, music, architecture, family structures, and foods. Why are both nations being asked to share such an impossibly small and controversial piece of land? Are they not being called to develop a different understanding of the situation, with a different solution to the problem, so they can both be "lights unto the nations"? So many Nations with the same struggles for identity, autonomy and equality have been dealing for decades and centuries with unresolved traumas and have been trapped in the trauma cycle. It is time to break down the trauma vortex cycle in the world by understanding what trauma is, what healing requires and how to support it. In the case of the Israelis and the Palestinians, the world needs to recognize, validate and hold the suffering of both populations at the same time. It needs to help each nation help the other heal. It needs to help the Palestinians accept the Israelis and provide them with a sense of safety. It needs to help the Israelis provide the Palestinians with an independent state, to help them access their existing resources and acquire the missing ones.

Israel, the Arabs and the world must remind both Palestinian and Jewish religious Rights that they are both descendants of Abraham - if not brothers, they are at least religious cousins. Religious leaders must emphasize compassion and open mindedness; they need to abandon the voices of isolation, exclusion, and superiority. They need to ignore the voices calling for disconnection from the "other" and calling for enmity. They both need to hear the call so intrinsic to their Faiths, for treating the stranger as they want to be treated and for being their brothers' keepers.

The Arab Jihad goes against the Koran, which explicitly refers to the return of the Jews to the land of Israel before the Last Judgment. The Koran (17:104) states: "And thereafter We said to the Children of Israel: "Dwell securely in the Promised land. And when the last warning will come to pass, we will gather you together in a mingled crowd."

The destruction of Abraham's Arab descendants by Jews would also be against the religious writing of Isaiah speaking of all nations worshipping on the same mountain.

Each nation must become aware of the nature of its own unresolved trauma and the nature of its adversary's unresolved trauma: Jews have to remember that the Arabs are not the anti-Semites of history and that Jews have lived in Arab nations for centuries without serious persecution. The Arabs need to remember that Jews did not come to Palestine to colonize them or destroy them. They came in search of a desperately needed refuge to a land to which they believe they have a long historical and religious claim. Jerusalem was built by David, a Jewish king, as the capital of a Jewish kingdom that lasted a thousand years; During their two thousands years exile, dispersed Jews all over the world have prayed to be "next year in Jerusalem"; For 3300 years they have prayed facing Jerusalem which they have considered their religious capital and the spiritual glue uniting them everywhere; the name of Jerusalem is cited over seven hundred times in the Tanach, the Jewish Holy Scriptures. Jewish presence never ceased to exist in Palestine.

The religious aspect of the problem could be one of the easiest problems to resolve between Arabs and Jews. The Palestinian Arabs would need to understand the crucial importance of Jerusalem for the Jews as their holiest Jewish site, the Temple Mount, in The Old City. Several of the Jewish old historical traumas revolved around the loss of Jerusalem, which meant each time more religious persecution, massacres and mass exiles. Palestinians must recognize that Israelis have shown no intention to harm the Dome of the Rock or stop access to any holy sites. The issue of Jerusalem calls for a solution that does not speak of control or of land domination, but of entente and of empathizing with each other. It calls for a solution not based upon conditional peace, but a solution that will flow from a real peace- a peace from the heart. Both people today have strong spiritual cores because of their sacred books. But many layers of trauma, some very old, some more recent, envelop the core of each. Neither people will be able to resist the pull of the trauma cycle which disconnects them, stifles their hope, subverts their sense of the future and escalates their anger and violence, unless they can develop an understanding and compassion for their opponent's traumas.

The problem of land is urgent for both sides: Israel must be able to absorb all persecuted Jewry and the Palestinians need to be confident that there is enough land to provide for population growth, and possibly for the return of those who have family in Palestine. The road to good will requires a search for viable answers. There are certainly technologies available today that offer a real possibility of reclaiming land from the sea. And the water problem facing both people can only be resolved through peace and cooperation.

Solutions must be found quickly. We must again remember what the consequences would be if both parties do not find a common voice for peace: at the very least war between the two parties with unconscionable loss of lives on all sides. Not to mention the possibility of escalation towards biological and nuclear convulsion for the entire region. There are no winners in this scenario.

### ***Actions need to be taken by all parties involved***

The United Nations must take the lead in helping to find a harmonious solution. They can gather the top political brass on each side and engage them with the top mediators of the world. They must help Palestinians and Israelis reach a sense of power without hurting or overpowering the other side. They must help them develop their resources for safety and financial security.

The United Nations must condemn both Israeli and Palestinian excessive use of military power and the destruction of Jewish religious sites and cemeteries. It must respond even-handedly to the situation. It cannot stay silent over the brainwashing of Palestinian children to hate Jews and allowing them on the front lines of violent demonstrations. They must remember that one-sided resolutions reopen the Jewish and Israeli genocide trauma and provoke fear, paranoia and reluctance in the Jews.

The media of both nations can be an extraordinary tool in reducing and even stopping, the trauma reenactment and in healing the situation. By reporting the stories of their common efforts for solutions, of harmonious joint Israeli-Palestinian experiences of living side by side, of numerous cooperative projects that already exist, the news media can tap into huge resources of peaceful coexistence experiments already taking place (school, summer camps, medical, scientific and financial projects). Choosing to cover only the sensational, the dramatic and traumatic images only promotes more fear and paranoia. It exacerbates the already very aroused nervous system of both populations and creates more polarization and less willingness to resume any thoughts of peace. The media of other countries must do the same: refrain from exploiting the traumatic and encourage the healing. They can do so by reporting impartially on both struggles and by emphasizing the attempts at restraint and reason on both sides instead of the escalation of the conflict and tragic accidents. Moderate voices in the Arab world have to be allowed to rise without being silenced by threats. These voices could help their people resolve their trauma instead of exacerbating them. Such voices can use their media to promote understanding, reason, compromise and hope for a shared future. Again, reporting on and extolling the words and the actions of moderate and peace seeking voices and actions on both sides can do this.

Israel must abandon the language of threats, power and ultimatums. Israel must try to understand that Palestinians fear for their survival. A whole generation has wasted its life in refugee camps. The Israelis are baffled as to how the Palestinians can make demands for territories while at the same time declaring their intention to push them into the sea. Israelis must learn to understand the Arab way of thinking and learn to negotiate accordingly. They must teach Arabic and Arab culture to their kids. It is imperative that negotiations with the Palestinians take place with culturally sensitive Arab Jews. Israelis must do all they can to spare Palestinian lives and at the same time defend all Israel's citizens from harm. Israel needs to speak of consequences instead of punishment, in its efforts to end this second Intifada. "If the political process is over, then we do not have an option: we will have to respond to violence in kind and that is not what we want" instead of the "we give you 48 hours..."

Israel needs to stay respectful and keep extending its hand for peace, even while it feels it has to use force. It must explain its view that the Palestinians have missed the opportunity to show that they can respect Jewish religious sites. Israel must remind the world and the Palestinians that it has earned the responsibility to presently control Jerusalem because under their rule, all Muslim and Christian sites have been preserved and made accessible to all faiths. Israel also needs to recognize that a different approach might bring a better solution, in the future, for all parties involved. It must show that it wants to control Jerusalem to guarantee access to and protection of its religious sites because under Jordanian rule, 58 Jerusalem Synagogues had been destroyed, an ancient Jewish cemetery on the Mount Olives was systematically desecrated and Jews were prevented from visiting the Temple Mount and the Western Wall.

Israel needs to understand and recognize the impact that its reestablishment after two thousands years in the land of Palestine, had over the population that was living there. It is not the Israelis' fault, but it is not the Palestinians' fault either. It is understandable that the

Palestinians do not want to accept a new reality that they did not provoke. This validation is indispensable in order for the Palestinians to make room for the Israelis. Compensation must take place, possibly in helping to set up the Palestinians' infrastructure. The Palestinians need to recognize the reality of Jewish ancient and present history and that Israel is here to stay.

Israel needs to treat Arab Israelis with equality, at the same time that it holds them accountable for loyalty to the survival of Israel. It must fight prejudice in its population against the Arabs. Israel must continue inviting the Arab States to exchange expertise. They must not be discouraged by the Arab withdrawal every time the peace process is stuck, for this is merely one of the many ways that old traumas manifest themselves in the Arab world.

The Palestinian Authority has to exercise its power to control Arab "terrorist forces" as the Israelis must do of their right-wing fanatics. The Palestinian Authority must also understand that every time it calls for Israel's destruction by the Palestinians and by the Arab world, it loses the Israelis' trust and postpones the peace process. They must understand and recognize that they perpetuate their own political occupation because their violent rhetoric, rioting and suicide bombers rekindle the Jewish trauma and incites fear in Israelis over their long-term survival. Israel becomes unable to consider a political solution if it thinks that it is in vital danger, its actual military superiority notwithstanding.

The world must give an unequivocal message that it will not stand for the destruction of Israel. This message must be given to the Arabs with unmistakable clarity to soothe the Jewish trauma. The world needs to understand that the Palestinians are preoccupied with their present state, while the Israelis are preoccupied with their future safety.

Israelis must do their utmost to spare Palestinian lives. Every Palestinian killed is a tragedy that further feeds the Palestinian's trauma. The Palestinians must control and not sanction mob action in order to help heal the Jewish trauma. Every soldier killed or mutilated, every chant of joy over an Israeli death, will help exacerbate the Jewish trauma.

The Israeli Palestinians need to resist the pull of their brothers' traumatic reactions and, instead, serve as a bridge for peace. They must not confuse their struggle for more equality with their brothers' struggle for autonomy.

The Jewish world in the Diaspora needs to be aware of its own unresolved trauma and develop the ability to consider the needs of both people when trying to resolve the problem. Every child that dies, whether on the Palestinian or Israeli side, must be viewed as a real tragedy by both parties, by Arabs and by Jews all over the world. There cannot be favorites. There must not be favorites for the nations of the world either, for there cannot be winners and losers in this situation.

## **There can only be all winners or all losers.**

The overtly selfish choice for each nation would be to succumb to their traumatic reactions hoping that they can expel or get rid of the other. However, the cost in loss of humanity and integrity for either population in pursuing this choice would be incalculable. Hopefully, the world will not stand for it.

A peaceful resolution can only come about if the tragic and traumatic nature of this struggle, historically and in the present, is recognized for the sake of all involved and especially for the sake of future generations. This will only come about if all language of blame and revenge is utterly rejected. Rather, we must understand and consciously acknowledge the cycle of shared trauma that is being reenacted and recognize that we all have the power to transform the outcome by embracing the language of healing, the religious principles shared by both cultures and the intention to heal that can lead to mutual forgiveness, peaceful resolution and the cultivation of trust.

Healing is possible. We have learned much about the nature of trauma on both the personal and the collective end over the past generation. There are people around the world trained to work with healing trauma that can be called upon. A foundation is being formed to work with trauma in clinics and hospitals, over the radio and in television. There are clear guidelines that the media of both populations can follow to stop the trauma cycle and guide the healing of both communities. There are interventions that can be done with mothers and infants of both groups that will help heal the collective trauma. Just allowing the voices of reason and measure in both communities to rise and to guide the process of healing will already transform the situation.

We can work with these traumas individually and collectively. First we need to acknowledge and express the shared grief carried in the bodies, the experiences, the stories and the cultures of both populations. Collective rituals to bring about cultural and national healing can follow. We must understand that healing can take time. But the intention to heal and to end violence is in itself extremely powerful and transformative. The healing process is also contagious. It is the embodiment of deep spiritual and religious principles we all hold. True resolution and peace in the Middle East can only come from this level of commitment and embodiment. There may still be “incidents”, but gradually there will be greater numbers of people who have the capacity to contain and work with those expressions of pain or frustration, rather than react to such incidents, for the sake of the whole, even for the sake of the land itself.

Both nations need to understand that trauma healed allows for a spiritual transformation difficult to obtain otherwise. To develop the necessary qualities needed to share this small and most precious piece of land both nations need to heal their own trauma and develop humility and compassion for the other. Both nations can attain the greatness of which they are capable. This is a unique and extraordinary opportunity to join East and West and create a wise, sacred and balanced way of responding to life that could truly be a light unto the nations.

Amen and Inshallah

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If you are interested in facilitating this healing work in the Middle East by volunteering your skills, further ideas, financial support or helping with the development of the trauma foundation and network that is being formed in Israel, please contact me.

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Gina Ross was born in 1947 in Syria, Aleppo, from Jewish parents whose families have been natives of Syria for centuries. She fled with her family at the end of 1947 to Lebanon. They were the last Jews allowed to leave Syria for years to come. Armed with an Iranian passport (Lebanon could not issue them one as they were Jewish Syrian refugees) Gina and her family left Lebanon in 1958. Again they were the last plane allowed to leave before the arrival of the American troops. They landed in Turkey for a short while and spent the next year between Switzerland and Italy before they got their documents to move to Brazil.

Gina attended French schools in Brazil and lived in a tightly knit Jewish Syrian and Lebanese community. Her father spoke fluently only Arabic and despite all the family's tribulations believed that the Jews and the Arabs could live very well together. Arabic food, music and dancing were a natural part of the community's life.

Gina moved to Israel on a scholarship, by herself, in 1970. She developed a deep attachment to the country and felt very close to her Israeli family. Gina moved a year after to the U.S., to Canada for a year and back to the U.S. She has lived since in California. Her son and her twin sister live in Israel. She is deeply involved with the Middle East affairs and believes peace will only come when both sides learn to care for each other.