

Speechless in Jenin

This is a post from an old friend of mine who is in Israel/Palestine as a nonviolent peace witness. She is a longtime peace activist, nonviolence trainer, and someone I trust absolutely.

-- *Starhawk*

From: tycho

Sent: Monday, April 22, 2002 10:35 PM

Subject: Speechless in Jenin

Dear Friends,

Would that i had my copy of Faustus here, to provide the exact quote that has been in my mind since i first stepped into the horror of anti-humanity that is now Jenin Camp, the exchange in which Mephistopholes points out to Faustus that hell already exists here on earth. After what i have witnessed there, i am beyond quotes, beyond words, almost but not quite beyond tears, which flowed last night even in my sleep. The Israelis conducted a ruthless, calculated massacre and left in its wake an abyss of sorrow, anger and vengefulness. If Sharon had himself entered Jenin and carried out these atrocities, the shock factor might not be so great, yet there were 20,000 israelis in that camp, operating under gestapo-like orders and thus, Israel is also going to suffer from this as well, as it must in the eyes of justice - if any justice can still be found in the world today.

At least half the camp has been flattened. The IDF set its bulldozers at the top of the hill and kept going until they reached the bottom. People were buried alive and the location of the bodies is done by a mixture of scenting out the corpses and getting recollections by survivors of who ran into which house, or under which set of stairs, during one or another F-16, Cobra or Apache attack. Three days ago a teenager was pulled out alive, but the rest of his family, all dead, are still under the rubble. i read that Shimon Peres is claiming only 3 non-combatants were killed and am truly stunned by the shameless embedded in such a statement. Based on what i have seen with my own eyes and smelled with my own nose, i think it is safe to safe there must be at least dozens, if not more, still laying under the pile. This does not include the places where people have told me they saw israeli soldiers dumping bodies into mass graves. We won't know the reality of this for some time, as it will be a while yet before people will turn their attention to someplace other than the pile.

There are tons of pictures emerging now from this atrocity, yet i don't think any two-dimensional image or even passionately written prose can adequately capture what one witnesses in this place. It is like being at a community funeral for an entire

community, and one feels the desperation inherent in shock standing amongst the people as they furiously try to dig out their dead from underneath slabs of rebar-laden cement, screaming for a bulldozer to come, screaming for face masks, flashlights and body bags. When a body, intact yet blackened and maggot-ridden, is carried out on a stretcher, people have to fight with sensational-hungry photographers to see whose ID card is pulled out of the clothing - their friend? father? brother? sister? The Palestinians themselves are dealing with this mess, and one feels also the reticence and anger inherent in the knowing of this, that even at such a time they must do it all on their own, while the outside world gorges itself on pictures of their non-recognizable loved ones and international envoys dourly tour the camp but then do nothing to help them. As one man said to me, tears in his eyes, why do the Russians send this man here? Yes, we want the world to see this but i cannot even find where my house was - what we need from Russia now is a bulldozer not a tourist! Others compare the camp to the World Trade Center pile, asking where the world's concern is for these innocent civilians, many of whom could have been saved if same level of 24-hour search and rescue had been carried out (though the IDF refused to let any aid workers in for far longer than the UN should have accepted).

i watched a young man scrape the burnt remnants of decaying flesh off a slab of cement, place them on a bright red kuffiya uttering a prayer over what is left of his two little girls. Another man dug up the body of his daughter, lifted the cloth over her decaying face to tell her to go with god. (is it possible there is actually a beneficent god involved in all of this?) Medical Relief workers are walking around with plastic bags full of body parts that once were whole human beings, and unexploded ordance is everywhere, inflicting serious injuries daily. What does one say to a teenage girl who turns up with the arm of an infant, asking "What should i do with this, i don't know who is the mother?" There is as much blood and pieces of flesh still on the walls of those buildings the bulldozers left intact (on the periphery of the pile) as there are spray-painted stars of david. Some kind of surreal israeli acting out of what they learned from the Nazis, one assumes. People are sitting in houses without walls, gazing out at the mess surrounding them and asking when someone will bring them water and food. These buildings are dangerous, yet they insist on occupying them. One college student climbed up into the second story of her burned out, now two-walled house, planted a palestinian flag on top of the rubble inside and managed to get out just before the floor beneath her collapsed.

People ask me what i think the international community needs to do, and here are a couple of the things that immediately come to mind. First, they need to take the airport outside Ramallah out of the hands of the IDF so that the israelis no longer control who can get in and out of Palestine (yesterday 9 italian doctors were refused entry at the Tel Aviv airport, for example). This will also allow more material aid to get into the country. The neighboring arab states need to send a convoy of bulldozers and there is dire need for bomb quads that are familiar with both israeli-american and palestinian ordance (the resistance put explosives in the streets to detonate against the tanks, they are essentially land mines and one youngster lost an arm and leg the other night when he triggered the wires). The UN has brought in some large convoys, but the food is not being distributed well and yesterday we heard that one palestinian had killed another in a squabble over rations. Amnesty International has called for a full investigation into what happened in Jenin, and this effort deserves our support. Last but not least, an international peacekeeping force needs to come into Jenin to keep the IDF out. They

have surrounded the area and are shooting at people moving in and out of the camp - i personally walked out from Jenin City but i am not palestinian, wanting to see my friends and family inside, help out in some small way. Any arabic speakers who want to come and record testimonies would be more than welcome.

As always, there are so many more stories to tell but this email program limits my space and others are writing about this situation with infinitely more finesse than i can muster. So i will close by honoring the young volunteers with the Palestine Medical Relief Committee in Jenin. These people are my personal heroes - their collective resilience, comradery, dedication and unbelievable spirit under these conditions is beyond exemplary. One of them told me before i left that he hopes the next time i am in Jenin, it will be a free country - my response was that since i will be returning in two days that is obviously not going to be the case, but that when i consider the future of Palestine being in the hands of him and his coworkers, it will be a country worth coming back to again and again. Beyond that, i remained speechless, caught between the power and pain of these young people who refuse to be daunted and the travesty of the outside world's ignorance and arrogance that insists on keeping them imprisoned behind the viscious walls of this ruthless occupation that has clearly become nothing less than a Faustian bargain for their israeli captors.

Love & Rage,

Tycho