

## Denied Entry

Mar. 16, 2008

Today is March 16. Five years ago, I was in a small village in the Occupied Territories of the West Bank of Palestine with a group of volunteers from the International Solidarity Movement, which supports nonviolent resistance against the Occupation. We had gone because the villagers were being menaced by tanks from the Israeli military, and wanted witnesses, but by the time we arrived, the tanks had gone. Instead we wandered through the olive groves, studded with pink cyclamen and blood-red anemones, and ate barbecued lamb in the courtyard of an ancient stone house with domed ceilings and arched portals. It was a strangely idyllic day—until on our way back to Nablus we got a call. Down in Rafah, in the Gaza strip, a young volunteer named Rachel Corrie had been crushed to death by an Israeli military bulldozer as she attempted to prevent the demolition of a Palestinian family's house.

Today I sit in a room in Washington D.C. overcome by grief as in the next room my new friend Laurie writes out card after card with the names of the dead—American soldiers and Iraqi civilians, pile after pile of them. I'm grieving for all the dead, and a bit for myself, because I meant to be back in Palestine, or at least in Israel, now. But I have been denied entry and sent home, because of my past work with the ISM. I have been denied entry, even though my intentions this time were strictly to work with permaculture and ecology groups, including the three Israeli groups that have sent me formal invitations, and even though Israel claims to be a refuge of last resort for everyone born Jewish, as I am. The fact that I'm here, not there, is a measure of how much the Israeli authorities fear a movement of nonviolent resistance in general, and the ISM in particular.

Why is nonviolence so threatening? Violence attacks the body, but nonviolence threatens something deeper and more tenuous—the self-perceptions and rationalizations that let basically good people act in cruel and heartless ways. The Israel/Palestine conflict enacts on a mass scale some of the same dynamics as family abuse. Israel is like the abused child who grows up to be an abuser.

Abusers generally feel like victims—and truly the Jewish people have been victimized, again and again in history, culminating in the still unhealed wounds of the Holocaust. Every rocket attack, every shooting spree in a Yeshivah, every suicide bomb in a bus reinforces that sense of fear and persecution that seems to cry out for violence in return.

Once in Germany I walked through an exhibition on the propaganda of the Holocaust. One cartoon seemed to illuminate the dynamics of the current conflict: a burly, blond, muscle-bound body-builder of a German clubbing a weak, cringing, forelocked Jew. Israel was founded by a generation that said, "Never again will we be the ones who cringe and get clubbed." Instead, she has spent sixty years on the Nautilus, building her

military muscle. But somewhere deep inside is still the perception that Israel is tiny, fragile and weak and anyone who attacks her is the giant with the club. And so the suffering of the Palestinians, the real disparities in power, become invisible.

Nonviolence dramatizes and makes visible the true power differentials. Week after week, unarmed Palestinians and their allies march to the Wall to face tear gas, rubber bullets, clubs, and at times, live ammunition. Women sit in front of bulldozers, children march out of school to confront soldiers.

Nonviolence humanizes the enemy. When the Palestinians are seen as 'animals', as filled with blind, irrational, implacable hatred, it is easy to hate them in turn and to justify every system of control and every incursion. But nonviolence gives the enemy a face. Moreover, in the demonstrations against the Wall and the peace camps set up in the villages, Israeli peace groups often come to stand with their Palestinian allies, shattering the myth that Israelis and Palestinians can never get along, never collaborate or work together for common ends.

Abuse is perpetuated by secrecy and silence. The ISM and other peace groups such as the Women's International Peace Service and the Christian Peacemaker Teams have brought thousands of witnesses into the places that outsiders are not supposed to go: into refugee camps under siege, into villages and streets and checkpoints and the daily, dehumanizing grind of life under occupation. They witness, they write, they take pictures and videos, and then they go home and talk to people. They go where the mainstream media is unwilling to go, and tell the stories that are not being told.

And the ISM, in particular, has heroes and martyrs. Working with the ISM, I've been privileged to meet people of truly staggering courage—among whom I do not rank myself. My own courage is middle rank. Yeah, I'll stand in front of a tank, but at the end if it doesn't stop I'll get out of the way. I've known a woman who would walk up to artillery and put her hand over the mouth of the gunbarrel. Rachel and her team stood out in front of Palestinian wells, day after day, under fire from Israeli sniper towers in the distance. Tom Hurndall ran under bullets to rescue children under fire from Israeli snipers, who targeted and murdered him. And there are many, many more.

I feel somewhat overrated to be counted among their company. My plans, as I've said, were actually different this time. I had hoped to work with the land, to teach some of the techniques of bioremediation that I know and to learn from the many wonderful groups there. I feel great grief that I cannot do that work. But if that is the price of my commitment to justice and nonviolence, I am willing to pay it. It's a tiny price, indeed, a miniscule sacrifice, compared to those, like Rachel, who have given their lives.

-- *Starhawk*

To read a longer account of my experiences, see:

[www.womenandspirituality.net](http://www.womenandspirituality.net)

To download two songs I cowrote with my brother, Mark Simos, about Rachel, Tom and Rafah, see:

[www.songssofconscience.com](http://www.songssofconscience.com)

To support the work of the ISM, see:  
International Solidarity Movement  
[www.palsolidarity.org](http://www.palsolidarity.org)

Permaculture and green groups working in the West Bank can use your support for their work. Tax deductible checks can be written to:

Global Village Institute  
PO Box 90  
Summertown, TN 38483

Send c/o Alayne Deptula  
Earmark checks: West Bank projects

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