

Tristan Shot in the West Bank

by Starhawk

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As I write, my friend Tristan lies hovering between life and death in an Israeli hospital, shot in the head, hit with a tear gas canister at a nonviolent demonstration in the West Bank town of Ni'lin, protesting the wall the Israelis are building to isolate the West Bank.

Tristan is—I say 'is' because I don't dare slip into 'was' for I fear that his hold on life is so tenuous, a shift into past tense might tip the balance--Tristan is always there, at every demonstration, every mobilization, every fight for justice. He has always seemed fearless to me, with that young man's confidence in his physical body that I now envy. He's not so young—thirty-eight, still, I have twenty years on him and he seems young to me, strong, hardy, willing to sit in a tree for months to protect a grove of oaks at UC Berkeley, willing to camp out and show up early to clean out the convergence space, to eat bad pasta and dumpster-dived vegetables for weeks on end. Tall, slim, with dark eyes and olive skin, and a sharp, aquiline nose that starts off in one direction, then changes its mind and heads in another, he comes regularly to our rituals as well as actions, and helps build the North altar every year at the Spiral Dance. Softspoken, unassuming, more than anyone else I know he embodies a certain ideal of rigorous equality, never pulling rank nor trumpeting his considerable street cred, never asking for attention, simply showing up again and again and pitching in to get the work done.

Why don't the Palestinians adopt the tactics of Martin Luther King or Gandhi? And the answer is simply this—they do. For the last six years, they have mounted an ongoing campaign of civil resistance against Israel's apartheid wall, which snakes through the West Bank, confiscating Palestinian farmland without compensation, destroying the life and livelihoods of whole villages, literally setting in concrete the fractured geometry of Israel's incursions, her illegal settlements that eat away the integrity of any potential Palestinian state. In the spring of 2004, when the army was just beginning to bulldoze olive orchards and scrape land bare, the villagers of Mas'Ha set up a peace encampment on the wall's route, inviting support from internationals and Israelis of good will. I've written elsewhere about what it was like to be there, encamped in one remaining grove under a full Passover moon, the despair of the bulldozers and the slim hope watching young Palestinians and Israelis sit together around a fire, sharing smokes and stories. Here are links to those page:

www.starhawk.org/activism/activism-writings/israel_palestine/mas'ha.html and
www.starhawk.org/activism/activism-writings/israel_palestine/mas'ha_last.html

For six years, the movement has moved, from village to village, following the path of the wall. Six years of sparse and tiny victories—here and there, the route of the wall pushed back a few meters—but in Palestine, even the smallest victory stands out because it is so unusual, so different from the expected course of events. Like starving

people who survive on crumbs, Palestinians nourish their determination to survive on even the smallest grains of success.

Mostly, I think, the movement survives because, in the face of horrific injustice, people need to do something. The vast majority of Palestinians do not want to strap on a suicide belt or pick up a gun. Contrary to all the stereotypes and racist assumptions, they don't want to kill, or be killed, for that matter. But they want to do something.

So they come to the wall. Children carry signs, women sit in front of bulldozers, men chant slogans and pray. Supported by a few internationals and a few determined Israelis, mostly ignored by the world's media, they face tear gas, rubber bullets, real bullets, arrests and beatings. And if the demonstrations have not yet stopped the wall nor won over the hearts of Israelis, they have at least given strength to the hearts of Palestinians and those who continue to hope against hope for some ultimate justice.

For that, many have died. Tristan, young though he seems to me, has had more of a life than Arafat Rateb Khawaje, who was shot in the back by Israeli forces at a demonstration in Ni'lin on December 28, 2008, when he was only twenty two. On the same day, Mohammed Khawaje, aged twenty, was shot in the head with live ammunition. Brain dead, he lingered for three days until he died in a Ramallah hospital. And they, so young, still had more life behind them than Yousef Amira, only seventeen, shot with rubber-coated still bullets on July 29, 2008. And yet they, too, seem ancient compared to Ahmed Mousa, only ten, shot in the forehead with live ammunition on July 29th, 2008.

And that is just the body count of one village, one year. I grieve for Tristan because he's a friend. I know him, I have marched with him shoulder to shoulder, sat in meetings with him, shared laughter and gossip and disbelief at the amount of liquor those British activists could put away. I feel for him in a way I should feel, but can't, for those who are just names on a list to me.

But I know that others do. Some mother grieves for Ahmed Mousa and will never fully recover from his loss. Some brother mourns for Khawaje, some father cries and rages over Yousef Amira's grave. Multiply that grief a thousand, thousand times and it explodes in rockets and suicide bombs. Yes, I also grieve for the Israeli victims of those bombs and rockets. But they cannot be stopped by walls, by land grabs and humiliations and injustice piled upon injustice, nor can they be silenced by the shrill voices who brand every critic of Israel an enemy.

Only justice can end the violence and bring peace and security to Palestinians and Israelis both. And it is time—it's long past time—for the clamor of international voices to demand real justice, for the continued violence now jeopardizes all of us.

So, here's what you can do:

- First, if you like most people are confused by the whole issue, educate yourself. Read a book—like Jimmy Carter's *Israel: Peace, Not Apartheid* which is about as fair and balanced a recent history as you'll find anywhere.
- Read my own website, Starhawk.org—on the Palestine page.
- Read the Israeli peace bloc—gush-shalom.org, or the reports from the International Solidarity Movement at www.palsolidarity.org. Or read "Start here"

on the Jewish Voice for Peace website www.jewishvoiceforpeace.org/.

- Speak out: Contact your representatives and demand a full, impartial investigation not just of Tristan's shooting but of the ongoing Israeli violence against unarmed demonstrators. But more than that, speak out on the issue. We have a new administration in office, a man who I believe is a genuinely good man with a nuanced understanding of the issue. But Obama is also a pragmatist who is not going to sacrifice the rest of his agenda on the rocks of this issue. For him to intervene effectively, to demand real concessions from the Israelis and push for a true resolution, we need to build a clamor that is too loud to be silenced by the pro-Israel lobby. So—write him a note. Go onto his web page and send him a note. Do this often!

www.whitehouse.gov/contact/

- Support groups working for justice and peace—like the International Solidarity Movement, like the many groups working on campaigns for divestment or boycotts of Israeli goods. Jewish Voice for Peace always has a good list of things to do. United for Peace and Justice has taken good stands on the issue and often has campaigns to join. www.unitedforpeace.org/

Al Awda is a national Right to Return campaign: www.al-awda.org/

Oberlin Students for Justice in Palestine has a great page of links:

www.oberlin.edu/stuorg/sfp/pages/links.html

We're in a new era now—and public pressure may actually do some good. It's time for all of us to stand behind those who stand unarmed at the wall. If we do, even the small things that we can do with little risk, they will mount up like grains of sand until they shift the scales and bring about real justice, true security, and honest peace.

-- *Starhawk*

Starhawk is an activist, organizer, and author of *The Earth Path*, as well as *Webs of Power: Notes from the Global Uprising*, *The Fifth Sacred Thing*; and eight other books on feminism, politics and earth-based spirituality. She teaches [Earth Activist Trainings](#) that combine permaculture design and activist skills, and works to offer training and support for mobilizations around global justice and peace issues.

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