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# A Different Kind of Tunnel

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With the firm belief that the best way to teach is to use oneself as a text, I've tried, in ways which I thought appropriate, to share my own grappling with Operation Protective Edge with the Fellows and alumni of BYFI through this dvar.

Here is what I have concluded: The world needs a different kind of tunnel.

On the day Operation Protective Edge began, Or, Larry and I participated in a visit to the mourning Abu Khdeir family in the Shuafat neighborhood of Jerusalem. The men of the family, including Muhammad's father, stood at the entrance of the tent and received each visitor independently, shaking hands, for the most part in silence. I couldn't help feeling that these handshakes could mean so much more than handshakes on the White House lawn between world leaders. We were reminded, before coming, that the media were not invited. By far, this non-verbal, face-to-face communication was the loudest statement of the entire visit.

These handshakes could be the beginning of a different kind of tunnel.

There is a barrier built with decades of pain, fear and anger. It is textured by endless

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prayers and wails of mourning. It is solidified by clashing historical narratives, endless books, blogposts, boycotts and images gone viral. Claims of victory (though no admissions of defeat) and promises turned betrayals. It is virtually alive with hatred and calls for vengeance. It reaches to the heavens and zigzags across every continent, through neighborhoods and even homes. If we are honest, we will admit that this wall will not come down any time soon.

Because of this, we urgently need a tunnel, dug by both sides, abiding by a prophecy that they will meet in the middle. As the war rages and the wall messily thickens, the call must go out to those who will dig underneath it not to attack each other, but to hear each other.

Wartime is not an off-season for interfaith activists. But it need not be a moment of reflexive peace-mongering in the face of justice or morality. It must be a time of regrouping and taking strategic action.

The tunneling tools are simple enough. Listen, just listen to how people have suffered, how they feel afraid, why they hate. Express sympathy. Call out your own people for unchecked hatred or disregard for human life.

For all the skeptics who feel confirmed by the war that interfaith action is irrelevant or ineffective, consider why those who seek to deepen the conflict on either side feel so threatened by efforts to build relationships? One of the movements most threatened by interfaith efforts between Muslims and Jews is the global push to “Boycott, Divest and Sanction” Israel. Whereas, by all accounts, some degree of normalization of relations is a necessary prerequisite for co-existence, some BDS supporters condemn interfaith efforts on the premise that Zionists are engaging in “faithwashing”. What other path could conceivably lead to a resolution besides for getting to understand and trust each other? As global interfaith efforts reach scale, they increasingly shore up social capital which provide viable alternatives to war.

The day after Operation Protective Edge started, I heard Ali Abu Awwad speak. An activist during the first Intifada, Ali spent several years in Israeli prisons. Some years after he was released, his brother was killed by an Israeli soldier at a checkpoint, an action for which the soldier was later disciplined. Ali was filled with rage and contemplated a revenge action. His family received a phone call from an Israeli parent who had lost their son to terror, asking if they could come over. He jokingly said that his home had been visited many times by Israelis, though never had they asked permission before.

As his family sat with the Israeli family, he watched the parents cry as they reminisced about their own sons. “I had never seen an Israeli cry; I didn’t know they could,” Ali said. “The entire IDF could not have stopped me from throwing stones during the first Intifada, but one single tear of an Israeli parent prevented me from going on a rampage.”

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The tunnel to each other can be dug with tears, even as the wall is not diminished.

Remember that on the day this war began, a handshake happened.

Let us dig from here.