



THE ARROW

A Journal of Wakeful Society, Culture & Politics



STEADFASTNESS & SOLIDARITY THROUGH
GENOCIDE: SWANA & ALLY VOICES

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THE ARROW

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THE ARROW

A JOURNAL OF WAKEFUL SOCIETY, CULTURE & POLITICS

THE ARROW JOURNAL explores the relationship among contemplative practice, politics, and activism. Inspired in its founding by the teaching and social vision of meditation master Chögyam Trungpa, *THE ARROW* welcomes the insights of multiple contemplative lineages for achieving a kinder, healthier, and more compassionate world. We encourage dialogue on wisdom and knowledge arising from methods of contemplative inquiry, ways of embodied knowing, and intellectual disciplines. In doing so, *THE ARROW* provides a critical and much needed space for investigating the meeting point of contemplative wisdom and pressing social, political, and environmental challenges.

This special issue was produced in collaboration with the
Sacred Justice Coalition.

Cover art by Kareem Ghandour
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Chief Editor's Introduction

MAHA EL-SHEIKH



My 15 years living in Palestine were a sacred blessing. As I sit here to write an introduction for this special issue of *The Arrow Journal*, I find myself struggling for the words to capture what only the heart can feel of what it means to live and love Palestine.

Instead of words, images appear: of children of Al Amari refugee camp dancing Dabkeh; of listening to Fairouz with my colleagues as I drive them to our office in Jerusalem, a drive they could not make themselves because of the segregated roads; of the owner of my neighborhood vegetable shop asking if he could lend me money upon discovering that I had left my wallet at home; of squeals of joy as my best friend's children swim in the Mediterranean Sea for the first time, only 64 kilometers, three checkpoints, and one person allowed to drive from Ramallah to Jaffa away; of Fareed's infamous zeit and zeitoun—olive oil and olives—straight from his land; of Farashe Yoga Center's community pot-luck lunch featuring our favorite khibeze prepared by Amina, figs picked from Aisha's trees, and fresh herbal tea prepared

by Liz; and of the music, the dancing, the smiles—oh, the so many smiles—the generosity, and the pure love.

For me, this special issue of *The Arrow* on *sumud* (or sometimes written interchangeably as *sumood* throughout the issue) is a love story and tribute to the deep love, wisdom, and *yaqin* (faith) that only Palestine can tell and that cannot be destroyed by any amount of bombs, dehumanization, or genocide.

Sumud, “steadfastness” in Arabic, is a Palestinian practice of perseverance in the context of settler colonialism, occupation, apartheid, and genocide. It is a practice grounded in deep reverence and connection to the land, culture, and traditions as well as collective identity, family, community care and solidarity, political resistance, and spirituality. However, trying to define sumud with words doesn't do it justice. As Rasha Tayeh says in her offering, “Land, Biodiversity, and the Colony,” “Some words only make perfect sense when embodied or spoken in their mother tongue.”

In many ways, this special issue needs no introduction. The introduction is the heart and spirit of sumud itself.

In this genocidal time, during which Palestinians are being ethnically cleansed from their land and attacked and assaulted on the streets of the US, this special issue uplifts the unbreakable spirit of the Palestinian people. The pieces collected here are a testimony of voices, practices, teachings, and ancestral wisdom of Palestinian, Arab, and SWANA-heritage teachers, guides, healers, scholars, activists, and practitioners, who share with us the many expressions of sumud as practiced across different generations and multiple tragedies as well as through the land, ancestors, sacred grieving, food sovereignty, ancestral plant

wisdom, Dabkeh, and art. To read each of these pieces is to experience the aliveness and sacredness of Palestine and the SWANA region—the land and her people.

In her piece, “Sumud: Each Gen Has Its Gem,” Diana Salqan traces the practice of sumud and its evolutions over three generations of her family, saying,

“It was as if the baton of sumud was being handed from one generation to the next, each generation gaining wisdom and privilege to prepare them for the next phase. This passing of the baton underscores the continuity and evolution of sumud, as each generation carries on the legacy and adapts it to their struggle.”

Connection to and remembrance of the land and plantcestors is one expression of sumud that Layla K. Feghali, Rasha Tayeh, Banah el Ghadbanah, and Aisha Mansour and Shorouq Qawariq’s pieces offer us. Tayeh turns directly to the earth as she writes,

“As news of the genocide broke and continued, I found myself frantically planting in my backyard in Naarm...The more lives that were lost, the more seedlings I planted. The more destruction I witnessed, the more I yearned to connect with the earth and Spirit...I come to my garden to pray with an open heart and my hands deep in earth.”

Similarly, Mansour and Qawariq, who put that deep knowing into practice through their project Hurkat Al-Bireh to restore food sovereignty from occupation and colonialism reflect on how “Growing food to feed [their] communities is essential for [their] sumood.” In a reprint

from *The Land in Our Bones*, Feghali reminds us that “the plantcestors and land itself have carried hidden keys towards restoration,” and el Ghadbanah interweaves the ancient wisdom of plants and their potency to survive through the genocide in their poetical lines:

“Ancestor wisdom at the end of the world, language that means you will find a way to make it, to take care of each other, you will tend to life in times of unspeakable violence.”

Weyam Ghadbian finds, as they call it, a “micro-moment of sumood” in Dabkeh, the folkloric dance of the Levant. While the origins of Dabkeh are uncertain, one theory is that it may have originated from ancient Canaanite rituals to help crops grow, protect young plants, and scare evil spirits away. This may explain why I cry tears of joy and hope everytime I see or dance Dabkeh—each stomp, each jump a direct connection to our ancestors and to our land. Ghadbian writes further in “Western Buddhist Dharma Has a Zionism Problem,” “I know that dancing Dabkeh isn’t enough to stop a genocide or right the wrongs of colonialism, but maybe in the energy of these moments there is some spiritual medicine for these bleak times, a microdose of sumood that can fuel us.”

Further, the silence, neutral positioning, and silencing by many prominent Western spiritual teachers and communities regarding the ongoing genocide of the Palestinian people has been experienced as an ethical failure by many, bringing into question the lack of representation of Arab and SWANA-heritage people in dharma spaces, and anti-Arab and anti-Muslim biases within contemplative and spiritual communities. “Where were

you," asks Yahia Lababidi in his poem "Eclipse," "during the apocalypse on the other side of the world?"

In the zine, "GAZA: Calling for a Dharma Response," from which we offer selected writings, Kareem Ghandour implores, "Don't teach us about equanimity while they bomb hospitals!" Similarly, Sara Shapouri writes, "When we speak of *sīla*, or ethical living, our exploration is incomplete if we do not attune to how power affects and exacerbates our impact...silence is a form of communication that enables and feeds systems of oppression."

Finally, there exists another expression of sumud—grief as sacred love—that runs throughout this issue and is potently expressed through poetry. In her poem, "Is This What Was Meant for You?," Emanuelle Khoury describes an abandoned house:

*Crumbling, she holds onto the memories,
laughter, tears, lies, love.
She carries the terracotta pots filled with your
olive oil...
Our home knows, and she weeps, for she is
tired of standing strong. But
she won't waiver.
She stores your last breaths safely in her womb.*

And in "Square Break," Sarah Habib writes,

*Naked, we warmed our hearts on this hearth
Burning away all that incarcerated us—all
that made us less alive
Unbothered by the weight of our grief—be
cause they loved
They loved all of it—consumed in their giving*

In every variant of sumud's expression throughout this issue, love and yaqin lie at the heart of and fuel them all.

I extend deep gratitude to my colleagues at *The Arrow Journal* and Courage of Care for saying "yes" immediately with no questions asked when I approached them with the idea of this special issue—and for holding this issue with so much love, care, and sacredness. I especially extend my deepest gratitude to my brother and co-editor Kareem Ghandour, a true visionary who has not only manifested spaces of love, care, and belonging for those of us of SWANA heritage, but also works relentlessly to educate and transform dharma spaces into liberatory spaces. And, of course, to all the contributors to this issue—thank you. Thank you for being a part of this journey and for allowing us to learn and experience and practice these sacred teachings with you.

To those of us of SWANA-heritage living in and out of the diaspora, whose rich culture, traditions, and people are being dehumanized, may the energy of these offerings serve as a remembering of the aliveness, the care, the deep love of our people, our lands, our faiths, our plants, our music, and poetry.

And finally, to Palestine—my first love, and greatest teacher. To our Palestinian family, friends, and kin. We love you. We are with you. Even in the midst of genocide, you are teaching us life. May this offering serve as a collective prayer and practice of sumood. We are with you in heart and spirit. Your wails of grief are our wails of grief. Your fight for life, justice, and liberation is ours. We will never give up. We will never forget.

Palestine will be free.

With love and in solidarity,

—Maha El-Sheikh

Guest Editor's Introduction

KAREEM GHANDOUR



Through a year of live-streamed genocide, the world has become witness to the power of *sumood*. The world has been shaken not only by the violence inflicted on the Palestinian people, but by the indigenous spirit of Palestinian resistance. *Sumood* has become more recognized as an expression of sacred activism and a lived experience of spiritual resistance rooted in love, community, culture, and unshakeable connection to land.

The journey of editing and curating this work has felt like a sacred task through a year of continually expanding apocalypse and devastation. I am so humbled and honored to take part in the documentation of SWANA voices, ancestral wisdom, and a revolutionary spirituality for this historic time. The final stretch of working on this special issue took place through the expansion of Israel's ruthless bombardment on Lebanon, and it continued through periods of confusion and paralysis. The voices, visions and spirit in this issue made words speak when there were no more words left, and offered vision and inspiration through total collapse.

In these pages are different expressions of *Sumood*, shared through stories, conversations, historical accounts, poetry, and spiritual teachings. This issue also makes space for the emergence of a radical spiritual pathway, opening us to the ways that Gaza is liberating us and generously offering us spiritual teachings born from a ground of unimaginable horror and destruction. These teachings on steadfastness, faith, and collective healing offer us guidance on how to continue resisting and meeting these times of groundlessness we face globally. It is a humbling experience to receive and witness the wisdom of this pure spirit, especially as we now witness the limitations of several western spiritual leaders in their lack of moral clarity and capacity to adequately meet the reality of this time.

Through the development of this issue, I had the privilege of facilitating dialogues and roundtable discussions with new and old friends and comrades. These sessions opened new worlds for me around the ways I now understand *sumood* to be a living expression of a decolonial dharma. My conversation with Ashira Darwish is about *sumood* in traditions of community care and collective healing. Through personal anecdotes, stories, and histories, she shows us how a vision and spirit of liberation is held collectively by Palestinian communities and how it guides and sustains a sacred lineage of resistance and deep connection to land. We are taken through how this collective spirit is lived in cities, refugee camps, and villages as well as through cultural practices, healing traditions, and the spiritual force that is deeply held at protests.

The roundtable discussion with Maia Marie, Nadia Abdel-Karim, and Kritee Kanko explores sacred grieving practices as expressions of *sumood* and spiritual activism. Drawing on the differ-

ent spiritual and cultural lineages they carry, we explore sacred grieving as a bridge to authentic power, action, and ancestral healing. We deepen into a wide spectrum that covers the subtle and mystical dimensions to the practical care for our cycles of activism. Having joined these friends in holding online grief and rage circles, I felt a deep connection and spiritual solidarity with all the wisdom and insight shared in this dialogue.

This exploration of Palestinian dharma and the wisdom teachings from Gaza is threaded through all three dialogues contained in this issue, but the inquiry goes into greatest depth with my dear friend Lubna Masarwa. The reflections we captured here are the fruit of many conversations between us as well as the voice of her friend in Gaza, activist and writer Ahmed Abu Artema. Lubna deepens into several concepts of spiritual resistance including the teaching of *yaqin* (faith), which is also touched on by Ashira in the previous dialogue. *Yaqin* is introduced as a faith, trust, and confidence that is a deep foundation of sacred activism and a spirit so deeply rooted in the collective heart of Gaza. We are offered a profound vision of spiritual resistance, through the lived examples of what it means to live from the courage and refuge of *yaqin*. Ahmed offers us his heart and deep insights directly from Gaza, in the midst of deep loss, destruction and devastation. His voice, shared through Lubna's reflection, is a deep gift, offered to wake us up to our humanity and to remember who we really are.

Much of the work of this special issue already exists as part of many streams of SWANA

spiritual activism and many legacies of resistance through time: organizing and community building, reclaiming ancestral practices, land tending, listening circles with SWANA sangha, grief ceremonies, Dabkeh dances at protests, and much more. Our work has been fed by a large network of beings, ancestors, and energies known and unknown to us. Our boundless solidarity across continents, collective prayer, and action has guided and empowered this work and way forward.

I offer my deep gratitude to the team at *The Arrow Journal* and friends from Courage of Care for all their support, guidance, and generosity in seeding this much needed channel for SWANA wisdom at this time.

I also want to offer gratitude to all the dharma practitioners, leaders, and teachers who served as examples in modeling engagement and integrity in this time of moral crises. My main teachers Thanissara and Kitisaro, my peers from Sacred Mountain Sangha, and the Dharmapala 2 cohort Kritee Kanko, Lama rod Owens, Bhikku Bodhi, and Kaira Jewel Lingo. To my friends and peers in the founding groups of the Sacred Justice Coalition and SWANA+ Sangha across Palestine, South Africa, Pakistan, the U.S and the U.K., and for East Bay Meditation Center and Buddhists for Justice in Palestine.

May all these teachings, stories, and visions help us remember who we are and our place in this time. May we remain firmly rooted and protected by our *sumood* and *yaqin* to continue this journey for our collective heart and all beings.

—Kareem Ghandour



Artwork by
Sarah Sao Mai Habib



Square Break

SARAH SAO MAI HABIB

THIS POEM WAS WRITTEN in November of 2023 while floating down the Rio Grande, in a region currently appropriated as an international border between Mexico and the USA's state of Texas on the occupied lands of Lipan Apache and Tap Pilam Coahuiltecan Nations.

The Rio journey itself supported me in viscerally sensing, feeling, and further understanding how the brutality of colonial borders and occupations from Mexico to Falasteen are intimately linked. For example, the same Israeli military, surveillance, and carceral technologies are deployed and sharpened on both lands. Nothing escapes the brutality: not land, not humans, not water, not animals, not sky. And nothing escapes our vast loving kinships either. Despite how narrow domineering world views seek to dispossess us from our plurality, queer encounters persist; land, ancestral and spiritual wisdoms persist; and the transformative power of our inheritance and presence persist.

...

Sabr¹
blooming on the cliff
Water looms hidden
The sun always embraced me in this desert
The heat lured me in mirages of moisture
The constellation of tears
Quaking my innocence in breaks and arrivals
Eclipsing the way I was taught

A horse feeds on the banks
There was fire before we were forced
to give up things to remember
what was worth sacrificing for
We didn't believe we had the final decision
as we gathered around the fire
Naked, we warmed our hearts on this hearth
Burning away all that incarcerated us—all that made us less alive
Unbothered by the weight of our grief—because they loved
They loved all of it—consumed in their giving

There are winds that move us away from our origins
Rocks telling of meeting wind, water & gravity
They make marks—each a reminder of a portal
—no beginning—no end—
—no coming—no going—
They make marks through the repetition of
a song to praise life and honor death
المحيي المميت القيوم²

Why do borders hold such tension between
two vertical entities?
This is a canal, a canyon, a tunnel
===== a passage
made from return returning
We give what is left to give
We are floating East to where the sun rises
The Qiblah³
la ilaha illallah
la ilaha illallah⁴
حسبنا الله ونعم الوكيل
حسبنا الله ونعم الوكيل⁵
We pray in five remembrances
The square breaks at the fifth prayer.

SARAH SAO MAI HABIB (any pronoun) is a multidisciplinary artist and cultural worker and child of Vietnamese, Kuwaiti, and Iraqi diaspora based in occupied Tewa lands. Habib writes about intercultural, interfaith, and interspecies solidarities. Their work is in remembrance of the ancestors who support our embodiment of defiant expansive kinships and collective liberation. You can read habib's work at *Mindfulness Bell* magazine, *Hyperallergic*, *GAZA: Calling for a Dharma Response* webzine, *The Maintainers* blog, and *Minnow's The Dive* zine.

ENDNOTES

1. صبر, Sabr: Translates to patience/perseverance but also refers to the prickly pear cactus fruit, a resilient and nourishing plant with shared significance in occupied Palestine and the deserts of occupied Turtle Island.
2. المحيي, Al-Muhyi; المميت, Al-Mumit; القيوم, Al-Qayyum: Three of the 99 revealed names of Allah, of which any translation would fall short. However, drawing from the book "Physicians of the Heart": "Al-Muhyi is the one who gives life," "Al-Mumit is the one who causes death," and "Al-Qayyum is the only one who remains through all permutations of time and space." It is an existence beyond being or appearance, form, or continuance of form." These names relate closely to others: "Al-Hayy," "Al-Ba'ith," and "Ash-Shahid." Shahid translates to both witness and martyr.
3. قِبْلَة, Qiblah: Refers to "facing," specifically the direction Muslims pray, which is towards the Kaaba in Mecca. From the context of the U.S., the direction is East, which is important in many Indigenous cultures as a place of beginnings, renewal, and a source of vitality. Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem was the first Qiblah.
4. لا إله إلا الله, la ilaha illallah: A refrain of remembrance, which translates to: There is no god but Allah. Or, there is no creator but Creator. Or there is no divine but The Divine. A Zen Buddhist teacher of Muslim heritage once described this to me as a koan.
5. حسبنا الله ونعم الوكيل, Hasbunallah wa ni'm Al-Wakeel: "Allah is sufficient for us and the best disposer of affairs"; One of the most repeated prayers I heard coming from Gaza during this last year of genocide.



Interview: *Sumood* in Collective Resistance and Healing

ASHIRA DARWISH

GUEST EDITOR'S NOTE: It was a real privilege to have this conversation with Ashira Darwish after following her work closely for the last few years. Ashira has become well known for her powerful voice and fierce heart in the award winning documentary, *Where Olive Trees Weep*, which has played a vital role this year in documenting the stories, struggles, and resilience of the Palestinian people under Israeli occupation.

Building on the many stories and voices I witnessed in the film, our conversation uncovers what *sumood* looks like as a collective lived experience and as cultural tradition passed down through generations. Through stories of her life as a journalist and activist, we explore this lineage of spiritual activism and how the cultural practices of *sumood* are carried through in cities, refugee camps, and villages.

—Kareem Ghandour

...

Kareem: In this special issue, we're exploring *sumood* as spiritual resistance. Given the work you have done, including as a trauma healing practitioner, internationally renowned speaker, and your role in the powerful documentary *Where Olive Trees Weep*, how is *sumood* alive for you right now? As an activist and healer on the front lines, how do you see it as both a personal and collective practice of spiritual resistance?

Ashira: For me, sumood means two things: being able to be in community and having faith. Faith includes what we call full *yaqin*, which means an unwavering belief and knowing, a knowing in your heart of that which your heart desires the most. For me, it's the knowing that Palestine will be free. This is where spirituality takes form in the sense of visualizing the reality that you want. Visualizing a liberated Palestine liberated through the efforts, including the physical energy, of the collective. Sometimes we get stuck in the vision and we never go into the practice, but *yaqin* does not stop only at vision.

Though many practitioners might sit and practice in isolation, the visioning alone is not enough. In Palestine, visioning and taking the vision to action is happening organically on the ground. There is no one controlling the situation in the sense of someone or some group puppeteering how resistance looks. It's built in... This is intergenerational sumood that we have inherited as Palestinians.

In 1948, we experienced the Nakba, we experienced what it means for people to come from abroad with their guns blazing after us, kicking us out of our villages. We understood the lessons when so many of our refugees left their country in the hope that they would return after just a day or two, that the massacres would stop and all would be well.

77 years later, to this day, we haven't been able to return to our homes. We have seen what massacres and what Israeli brutality can look like. We can see the Western world today looking in shock and horror at how Israel is able to train dogs to go into the concentration camps where they're keeping our hostages and rape the men. People are in shock at how Israel can drop bombs stronger than Hiroshima without flinching at the number of children that are dying. For the Palestinians, we've known this for a long time. We've seen them come into Sabra and Shatila in Lebanon. We've seen what they are capable of doing in Deir Yasin. We've seen what they have done in Tantura, where they lined up the men and they shot them all. They killed the women, raped some of them, and made a massive grave and covered it up. They then created a park on top of it so that the remains of the village are not even seen. They did all this with complete impunity. We've not only heard the stories from our parents and grandparents, but this knowledge also lives in our bodies. For example, I inherited the fear my mother held for her parents when they got separated as a family in 1967 and my grandfather and uncles were separated into Jordan. I also know that nostalgia for life as it once was. If I close my eyes, I can almost taste and see how life was in the old city of Jerusalem, prior to the occupation, and why my mother is so hellbent on being able to go back to her house in the old city of Jerusalem. I see so many of my relatives living in this constant fog, a

confusion at not being able to find their home and knowing that it's there just awaiting their return. We inherited all of that.

All of this, including seeing how the current genocide is evolving and ethnic cleansing is happening, means that Palestinians have innate ways of sumood. Just as we've inherited trauma, we've inherited steadfastness, including ways of remaining on our land no matter what. We see it in Gaza right now when people say things like, "let the bombs drop, we're not leaving the houses. Let them kill us inside the houses," because these people, the majority of the people in Gaza, are refugees. They will not be relocated again. They will not leave the land and not be able to return to it. They're choosing to die inside Gaza rather than run from the bombing. Israel did not count on this. Israel was counting on people becoming terrified from the mass level of massacres and then running to Egypt for relocation.

There are many lessons that come with that. You can see the clarity of it in the refugee cities that have been created around Rafah. If you go into Al Amari or Jalazone refugee camps in Ramallah, you'll walk into each street and see that they are named after the streets in Yaffa and Haifa, in Akka and Al-Lydd, where the Palestinians were kicked out of. You'll also find that entire families still live together. You'll find that they still marry the same way that they used to get married. The same families still married to the same families that they used to in the village. Despite everything, people try to retain the bonds that Israel has tried to destroy. You will see that the refugee camps are the places where the resistance is birthed in Palestine because the refugees maintain strong community tribal bonds that secure and remind them every day that there's something to go back to, giving life to a collective vision in the refugee camp to return home. And collective vision means collective resistance. This is one of the reasons refugee camps are a target of destruction for the Israeli authority. For example, who are they targeting today in Jenin? Refugee camps. Everywhere they go, they go after the refugee camps because of this collective vision.

In addition to the collective vision of liberation, there is of course the faith: the underlying faith of the majority of the Palestinians, the Muslim faith, and also Christianity. We have the biblical belief, the vision, of what we call "Waad Allah," the promise of God that the land will be liberated. We hold onto that vision and transform it into the yaqin—that unwavering faith that we will return to our land and our houses—and we pass on this innate belief to our children. We add to that the key of return—the faith and knowing that we will go back to our land—to our grandchildren and their grandchildren so that nobody forgets where they come from. This is how spiritual practice meets action.

Kareem: I'm thinking about how this vision and compass you describe as yaqin is like a core energy or a spiritual source that fuels Sumood. We see this expressed in many different ways right now in Gaza. There have recently been more voices conceptualizing sumood in different ways, including as resistance in connection to faith, land, and culture. It's not just about being steadfast in the face of brokenness; there is a joy, vitality, and health in sumood that shocks the world. I keep going back to this depth of reverence and love that is expressed and sustained through sumood. What other spiritual qualities do you see?

Ashira: I see the beauty in every aspect of Palestinian life. I see the beauty in the path of resistance. Resistance is existence. For example, when I was in the village of Nabi Saleh, as someone who was born and grew up in between Jerusalem and Ramallah, two cities, I just fell in love with the way that the people live and love each other. I loved the community. I loved how people's houses are so close to each other. I loved how they lived on the mountain next to trees. I loved how much they have this deep connection to their land, to their fruits, to their vegetables, to every inch of every mountain and every herb on that mountain. I was taken by Ahed al Tamimi and her brother Abu Yazan up the mountain to have barbecues sometimes. And they knew each and every single herb on their mountain. They knew the name as well as the season to eat it. They took me mushroom picking. They took me to harvest asparagus. I thought asparagus was only a European vegetable that doesn't grow in Palestine, and yet there I was eating some of the yummiest asparagus in the village of Nabi Saleh.

Then they showed me this herb, Zeit' maneh, and how it grows in between the trees and rocks. It's a very steadfast plant. It grows wildly between the rocks, and it makes some of the most amazing tea. It works to support your nervous system and stomach. The people know every single herb that grows and how you eat it and how you work with it. And this knowledge is passed on to the children. There's so much beautiful connection interwoven into grandparents spending all the time with the children. And everybody's family is everybody else's family. You give your kid to your neighbor, and they take care of them just as if they were their own child.

I did not have that beauty and strength of community growing up because our families were forcibly dispersed in 1948. We were in the cities, everybody was kicked out. Whoever remained were segregated in ways that disallowed and discouraged community building. In the cities, we were then pushed this vision of individuality and encouraged to go after the American dream, including going abroad to study and work and chasing a life of material goods, of

unsustainable joy. That's what the cities created. And then I went to the villages and the refugee camps, my God, the contrast I felt in the flooding of love and the cup of tea and the stories I would hear is indescribable.

I didn't ever have olives, so I always dreamed of having land because I saw how people have this connection with the olive trees. I used to go to my uncle in Salfit, where he does the olive harvest and how he would talk to me about each and every drop of oil. I would drive three hours, rain or shine, no matter what was happening, so I could go and get my olive oil and soap from him. Spirit passes through this, spirit passes through the land, it knows when it feels loved, when its people love it. And the biggest sacrifice is the blood sacrifice for this earth.

And in Nabi Saleh Spirit was there. People die on their land to protect their land from settlers who don't respect it. Not only do settlers not respect the humans who live there, I think for us somehow it's even more like a dagger in the heart that they don't respect and appreciate our land. They took over the mountain next to Nabi Saleh and created villas with red roofs and also took over half of the harvest. And the area of the village well was turned into this park-like thing. And they don't feel it. They don't know what it means to be born into the land and connected to each and every herb in it.

It's a deeper knowing, the yaqin, they don't have access to. It was so potent in Nabi Saleh that I was addicted to going to the village, protesting. I was getting shot, tear gassed, injured, and I would still go. I would never wake up to go to university or school at four o'clock in the morning. It was horrible for me to wake up for anything. For Nabi Saleh, however, I was up at four o'clock in the morning so I could run before the soldiers closed the checkpoint. I would gather friends and get on a bus and make sure that I was there with this tribe, so that I can feel the sense of belonging. And I told them, if I die, I want to be buried here in your cemetery because you visit your dead every day. They're in your village. You get to hear the gossip of the neighborhood just by the people sitting under the olive tree. You are never left alone.

I feel that all of the dreams and the vision I had about Palestine materialized in seeing the community living together like that. And of course there are difficulties, too. For example, people complain that everybody's into everybody's business. After experiencing the community, I was like, I want everyone to be in my business if I get this level of love. Give me this love, and I will give up my individuality. This is the kind of sumood at every protest. Every time the Israelis would think that they were breaking these people by what they were doing, you would see them at night coming together around dabkeh music. We would have the Palestinian music, and everybody would cook, eat, drink their tea, and dance together. All the shot and injured would be taken care of.

I saw so many of these internationals who come into Palestine, and people don't understand why these ISM (international solidarity movement) people come and want to be part of the popular resistance. But I know it's because of this feeling of community, of being held so tightly in a love pact. That's where I learned the reality and the strength of what it means to have sumood interwoven into the community with song, dance, love, and compassion, with this innate connection to the land as our mother, our feeder, the place of resting where our cells will be decomposed, and the place where our fruits will grow. The cycle of death and rebirth was never so tangible as much as I felt it there, and it gave me the strength and the power to keep going no matter what.

Kareem: It's interesting to think of all this at the level of you being connected with that community, receiving so much energy to keep going, wanting to go back even though it's not safe. It shines light on how much of a source sumood that way of life is on a bigger scale, like for those living through a genocide right now.

Ashira: We see it in Gaza right now. They're still dancing. They're cooking for each other. They're starving, and yet you still see people sharing their food. Were this to happen anywhere else in the world, you would have people looting and committing crimes. Because of the level of strength and sumood built into our communities, even when Israelis try to plant seeds of destruction, they'll be weeded out so quickly.

Kareem: You talked about these general kinds of cultural traditions and practices that get inherited, and some of this is the Palestinian ancestral spirit. You're talking about the connection to the land as well as deep kinship and ways of being with each other. It's just a very natural kind of knowing that gets passed on. You mentioned cooking, dancing, and eating together. Are there any other community practices you've experienced or powerful memories you'd like to share?

Ashira: Singing together for sure. The music, the vibration. When the Israelis withheld the body of my friend Basal Araj, may his spirit rest in power, we spent seven days waiting for his body. We didn't want the spirit to go down, so every night we would sit and sing songs. Whenever the morale was going down, when the grief at not knowing what was going to happen would seep in, I would lead us into song and we would sing together. This happens in the protests as well. When the soldiers start hitting harder, the chant is the

voice, the chant is the thing that keeps them going. To know there are people still chanting, keeps us going, standing, and fighting. And it's not only about the voice, it's the vibration. It's the energy of the music. And I use music and sound therapy in healing work. I know the power it has, especially when it's done communally and people are chanting together. The Israeli military comes at us so hard when we are chanting. They want to stop it and break it because the idea of people sitting and singing together in peace disrupts their ideas; it goes against everything that they want to destroy. Music, our sound, is also the way that we release, and it echoes. It opens our gates into healing and grieving.

Food and eating is also important. *Salah* or prayer, too, especially coming together in prayer at funerals, being together at funerals with the families for the three days, and not leaving the families alone. Having that strength of community and faith is definitely one of the biggest reasons that Palestinians can still hold on. It's the faith in God that we will be liberated and also our faith that everyone, our Martyrs, are going to their heaven is a solace and it eases the pain of the loss for sure.

Kareem: When faith is talked about in this way, it's often seen as a larger belief system, but you're actually talking about it as daily lived experiences, ways of being in the midst of all this.

Ashira: Yes, people wonder why Palestinians are still upbeat and happy with everything happening around us. I remember the most alive I ever felt was when we were in action and resistance. The community was stronger. We were organizing. I was never left alone with my pain. I was always surrounded by people with whom I could grieve and release, and it's the knowing, too, that life is so impermanent, and it can disappear in a second. We've seen our friends die, and we've seen how death comes in, how you can lose people instantly and how it can happen to any of us. It's made me lose any connection I had to the material world. When I was a journalist, I had a period of strong attachment to the material, wanting to do and consume and look a certain way, but now this material world means nothing to me.

Through this experience, I now live in the reality that there's nothing I'm going to take with me when I go. It's not something you need to go into meditation to experience; it's a truth that's all around. I want to milk every drop of life and really be there for what I do have—my family and the present moment.

I've seen people right now expressing extreme levels of compassion and wanting to do good deeds, and it's hard to believe that every day they're doing this. And people will say, "we want to accumulate *hasanat*, or good deeds, be-

cause we know that there's a chance any second that we will die. If we die, we want to die with a good bag of good deeds." For me, it's like I want to experience every second. I want to be with my family and my friends. I want to do everything to the fullest. If I dance, then I want to dance to the fullest. If I live, I want to live to the fullest because any second it can be taken away. It was the most alive that I ever felt.

Kareem: It seems that there's more than just the accumulation of hasanat and good deeds. There's also a joy and a life force in that state of being. As you talk about all the kindness and compassion in Gaza, it's making me realize how much of that I take in on my Instagram feed. As much shock and despair as I take, I also get uplift and inspiration from Gaza in equal measure. It's a huge source of spiritual teachings and deep wisdom, coming from a real place, replacing the usual feel good content from inspirational or spiritual speakers or teachers. It's watching the kids, and the people, and the music.

Ashira: (pause) There's a deer outside by the apple tree! So beautiful!

Kareem: That's an auspicious time for it to appear!

Ashira: Anyway, so I also get my daily dose of support and uplift from when I see people. In my project, one of the therapists was in Gaza, and she was pregnant. She left her husband back in Gaza, and she went out to Egypt because she wanted to give birth in safety. But she wanted work, something to do. I asked her, are you sure you want to work while you're pregnant? And she's like, "Yes, yes, yes. Put me with the kids," because we trained her to work with children in trauma therapy. On the second day working, she sent me a message saying..."Thank you, thank you, thank you so much for letting me serve." And she shared about how much energy she gets from these kids who are orphaned and in need of care and support.

Some of these kids are injured. Some of them lost everything that they had in Gaza, and now they're living as refugees in Egypt. When they were given EFT tapping affirmations, like for example, "I'm grateful for this," or "I'm thankful for that," they soon stopped listening to her affirmations and started their own, like "we are grateful because we're from Gaza," "we are strong, we are powerful, we're the most beautiful people because we have each other." She told me how much strength she gets from being in service like this.

And I always used to feel that as well, that you don't even accumulate trauma when you are working to serve others. There's something that's like *rahma*,

compassion from God, that when you are in service, you do not accumulate trauma. People who work as paramedics and doctors, when they're in the field in the middle of war zones, they don't get as traumatized as people sitting on the television watching what is happening and developing secondary trauma from watching bombs dropping without being able to do anything to help. For those who are in action, the feeling of serving ignites serotonin, ignites happiness hormones in them so that they don't feel the trauma. And I feel that this is very much happening in our community and other communities, but it's only because we've been witnessing so much tragedy that we have more opportunities to serve as well as resilience in our service.

Kareem: When you talked about the most alive you felt, being at the actions, I think about the non-dual or non-binary nature of spiritual practice and being in action. I know you do dynamic meditation and whirling practice, and I'm thinking about the aliveness and connection of being in that state of intentional prayer and how it doesn't sound too different from how you describe being in direct action, chanting communally, and facing violence. We can have this simplistic view that spiritual practice is there to make us better activists or make sure we don't burn out, but what we're talking about here is a living example of the same energy flowing from one stream to another, from practice to action and back again.

Ashira: They feed each other. If you're not in action, you definitely need to do much more yoga and spiritual practice, more inner work. I feel that I need more whirling here in the U.S. I need to do more yoga and meditation to survive in this materialistic universe, whereas in Palestine, it was just the being that I needed to be in.

Kareem: The last question I'll ask to round this all up is: what do you feel is the most powerful thing we're learning from Gaza about life, liberation, and freedom?

Ashira: I think the most important lesson for me is how fake the Western world is. I've known it, but I've never really experienced it at such a high level. I still had my faith in organizations and legal aid, and the failures of even these at such a critical time woke me up. I think what Gaza has done is shatter the mirage of the material Western colonialist world. After years of indoctrination living under occupation and also under the control of globalization and colo-

nialism, I feel that I'm finally free of that, that I don't want anything to do with that materialistic world any longer.

I have so much pride and honor that has grown in me over the past six months, more than I've had before in my whole life of being a Palestinian, a Muslim, a woman of color, of coming from the Middle East, of having my Egyptian heritage. And I have years of learning ahead of me to get to know more about my culture and to bring that back into my being. I feel that a part of my being before these times was occupied by ideologies, fantasies of feminism, democracy, and this western manmade world. Now those ideologies and fantasies are like a cloak I want to take off. Like a cloak I have taken off. Now I'm just trying to find myself in my own skin again and to have pride in that skin for once. I'm tapping each day into more lessons of intergenerational gifts that were given to us and to honor that and to share it, including this concept of Sumood, with people who are exactly the same as us but have been stripped of it as their birthright.

ASHIRA DARWISH is a Palestinian embodiment trauma healer and motivational speaker. Ashira's approach to trauma healing is highly specialized and culturally sensitive and has been recognized for its efficacy in addressing ADHD, PTSD, and continuous trauma in both children and adults. Her modality includes Sufi and Kundalini meditations and exercises encouraging deep relaxation, healing, and trauma release. She is also a certified emotional freedom technique EFT therapist, coach, and sound healer. She is the founder of Catharsis Holistic Healing and has trained and supported over 200 practitioners from the Arab world and continues to provide vital, free trauma support to those in need around the world.

KAREEM GHANDOUR is a Lebanese/Palestinian teacher, facilitator, and artist based in the UK. His teaching is inspired by contemplative creativity, ritual, and devotional practice. He has worked with youth and in mindfulness based education projects for the last decade, including serving as managing director for iBme UK. He is a co-founder of the Sacred Justice Coalition and the SWANA+ Sangha, co-creating new dharma cultures to meet times of genocide.



Is This What Was Meant for You?

EMMANUELLE KHOURY

Tell me, why does the olive tree continue to grow after you have gone?

Warm, musty wood, hot to the touch, twisted and rough.
Silver green leaves, fuzzy, and small.

Standing, not tall, like a pine tree, but hunched over, branches heavy with
fruit.
Fruit that falls to the ground, food for the mice and the bats.
The rest of the ripe, green olives barely cling
to the tip of the boughs.

Tell me, why are you no longer here to harvest the olives?

The tree rises, stalwart next to its century old companion, the house with
the red shutters
turned rusty orange in the South Lebanon sun.

A knotted branch reaches over to touch her stone façade.

Tell me, is the abandoned house—loved and lived in for so long—lonely
now?

Empty, cavernous, waiting.
Closed shutters, locked doors, missing key.

Crumbling, she holds onto the memories, laughter, tears, lies, love.
She carries the terracotta pots filled with your olive oil.
A vault, she stores your photos and books. Somewhere in there are your
letters
the only witness now to your doubts and your hopes.
For yourself, your home, your land.

This house—our house—sitting atop the hill, listens to the bombs in the
distance, holds the
whispers of bombs from the last war.

The cicadas' songs are interrupted, again.
White phosphorus fertilizes the land now.
Boundless greed and corruption spike the air.

Tell me, do you know this, now that you are gone?

Our home knows, and she weeps, for she is tired of standing strong. But
she won't waiver.
She stores your last breaths safely in her womb.

Tell me, is this what was meant for you?

EMMANUELLE KHOURY is a professor of social work at Université de Montréal. She has been developing an anti-oppressive contemplative pedagogical framework, anchored in her personal experiences as the daughter of immigrants from Lebanon and Argentina, which informed her affective and moral understandings through their diasporic condition. Her contemplative work is also informed by her professional experience, which highlighted the often invisibilized knowledge that love and understanding can bring to the social work encounter. Her other research is in the field of youth mental health and in transnational and decolonial initiatives. Most recently she has been working with partners in Occupied Palestine to develop psychosocial, trauma-appropriate support groups and to facilitate the integration of graduate students from Palestine's Gaza Strip to Turtle Island (Canada) in the wake of the ongoing genocide, scholasticide, and domicile against Palestinians. Her short story, *The Dinner Party*, was recently longlisted for Pulp Literature's 2024 Hummingbird Prize.



Artwork by
Karzem Ghandour



Conversations: The Refuge of *Yaqin*

LUBNA MASARWA AND KAREEM GHANDOUR

GUEST EDITOR'S NOTE: The following is a cluster of recorded conversations between me and Lubna Masarwa, a Palestinian journalist, meditation teacher, and spiritual activist based in Jerusalem. She has been involved in actions for breaking the siege in Gaza for over a decade and has managed big teams of journalists in Gaza and the West Bank for the last 10 years as part of this effort.

As peers we both share a vision to co-create and imagine a revolutionary dharma for this historic time of genocide. For this piece, I wanted to dive deep with her into the visions of liberation coming from Gaza. Some of these talks were documented on retreats, on long drives from England to North Wales, and over cups of tea on zoom. These conversations are the first threads of a larger reflection that we have been exploring about the spiritual teachings that Gaza is offering to the world at this time.

In this piece, we explore a principle called *yaqin*, which, like *sumood*, is an important practice and spiritual foundation of sacred activism in Palestinian resistance. It is an unwavering faith, confidence, and trust in the freedom that shines through the people of Gaza. It is an embodiment of sacred justice that offers protection, fearlessness, and a navigation guide for collective liberation.

We explore what *yaqin* looks like as a lived experience with stories from friends in Gaza, and we also explore its parallels with dharma teachings. This piece also includes the voice of writer, author, and activist, Ahmed Abu Arte-ma. He is the author of the book *Organized Chaos* and numerous articles and one of the founders of the Great Return March. He is a refugee from Al Ramla village in Palestine, and we share extracts from his writings and conversations with Lubna during his time in Rafah in 2024.

—Kareem Ghandour

Kareem: I'm excited that we get to share some of these reflections we've been exploring together on what spiritual teachings Gaza is teaching the world, and, since we are both dharma practitioners, we can also say what dharma teachings are being transmitted to us.

We are talking a lot about *sumood* in this issue, and I'm glad we get to explore *yaqin*, which opens a much more vast picture and dimension of Palestinian spiritual resistance.

Lubna: When you first came to ask me to talk about *yaqin*, I wanted to go back to my Sufi roots and take out the writings of Ibn Arabi.

Yaqin is the foundation of faith and a deep and unwavering knowing in the heart. For us it's a trust that our resistance will lead to justice and liberation. This is a deep knowing that you feel in your bones. When you really know it, you are less rattled by the events and realities that surround you because you have *iman* (faith) and trust.

So, *yaqin* is the refuge of Palestinians in Gaza. We speak about refuge a lot in Buddhism. What is the refuge of the people in Gaza? It is refuge in Allah and in *yaqin*, a steady and persistent confidence that we are going in the direction of liberation and heading towards the bigger destination of justice.

Kareem: Can you speak more about how this trust in the direction of liberation holds a much bigger picture and has a more expansive timeline.

Lubna: Yes, there is something in this trust. Even if you don't see the results of your actions, the trust goes beyond a modern material mindset of doing something and immediately expecting fast results. There is something in the *yaqin*, which is a deep knowing that freedom and liberation will come even if not necessarily in my lifetime. There is a confidence that it will come. I always think of the example of an olive seed that might take around 70 years to become a tree. There might be children in the future, another generation and another people, who will benefit from its fruits and shade. There is confidence that there will be a tree eventually. This is why I prefer *yaqin*, or trust, much more than hope. Hope is more of a cliché, but in trust there is a deep knowledge that the actions I'm taking, and the price of sacrifice Palestinians are paying, is for the liberation of the people...and it may take time.

Kareem: As an activist and journalist, someone who has given up your life for this path of liberation, how does this *yaqin* carry you forward?

Lubna: If I didn't have this yaqin and trust, I would have given up a long time ago. And I think that is what has kept the people of Gaza and Palestine in general on their feet, one year later, as we have this discussion for this journal issue. It's been one year since the start of the genocide on Gaza. This is the faith and trust that is bigger than death, displacement, and exile, and stronger than anything. It's what's giving Palestinians this soul power to keep going on their path and to keep surviving this huge suffering, trauma, and killing.

These are people who have lost everything—their families, children, homes, businesses. The rootedness they show is something beyond our capacity to understand, beyond what we know about faith and steadfastness. In the midst of utter devastation, they are still saying “Alhamdulillah,” thanking God for his generosity.

Talking about this is by no means a way to romanticize and bypass the scale of suffering, disaster, and tragedy that people are living through. And, of course, naturally many are falling into despair, and some are trying to leave. We are talking here about the many who have stayed and are holding a rooted spirit and bringing us inspiring teachings about sumood and faith. We are documenting these voices without undermining or neglecting the wider realities and tragedies that are very present.

Kareem: Sometimes we can think of iman in more hopeful terms of just being patient and persevering for things to be better. This expression of faith and trust we are talking about is similar to how faith or *saddhā* is expressed in the dharma, which goes hand in hand with wisdom, and leads to confidence, trust, and energy on the path. So, it's similar to how you're describing yaqin as a lived experience.

Lubna: We can talk about faith, in poetic and inspirational terms, but when we look at how it's lived in Gaza, it's much more than that. When I speak with my friends in Gaza and read texts on my phone from people in Rafah, North Gaza, and other parts, I feel like I'm shown the real example. These are the Palestinians who know suffering, struggle, killing, and displacement and are still holding this faith. It's a huge difference. We're talking about people who lost their family, homes, their past, their memories, having no clue what their future looks like, and still they have this yaqin, which is an absolute and stable faith and rootedness in land, in themselves, in their freedom, and justice.

Transmissions from Gaza

Kareem: Let's hear about how you are seeing this being lived by your connections and friends in Gaza. How do they live and transmit this truth?

Lubna: I'd like to speak about my friend Ahmed Abu Artema and share some of his spiritual insights on surrender and *tawakull* (reliance) and the powerful writing that he has been sharing. Tawakull is another concept similar to refuge. It means full reliance and surrender, to entrust things into the infinite power of Allah.

When we speak about the liberation of surrender in spiritual traditions this is the essence of tawakull. When Ahmed talks and writes about it, it's coming from his lived experience of living through the hell of a genocide, from someone in the peaks of pain who has lost everything.¹

Ahmed, writer and activist, was one of the initiators of the right of return marches in 2021. He recently lost his eldest son and was displaced multiple times in the last year. His home was destroyed, and many of his family members died. He was also raised without his mother because she was re-located on the Egyptian side of Rafah, while he was on the Gazan side, so the siege did not allow them to live together.

One of the most profound things that impacted me recently is this powerful passage he recently wrote during his time in Rafah after losing his home and many family members, including his eldest son.

“When the pain reaches its peak and a person loses everything, then he realizes that the paths are blocked, so he stops trying and surrenders to his situation. When he reaches this state, a wonderful tranquility descends upon him, protecting him from external fear and sadness. The deep peace of surrender.”

عد أن يبلغ الألم منتهاه ويخسر المرء كل شيء، عندها يدرك انسداد الطرق فيكف عن المحاولة ويسلم أمره، فإذا بلغ هذه الحال تنزلت عليه سكينه عجيبة تحميه من الخوف والحزن الخارجي، لأن الجنة تبدأ من لحظة التسليم.
السلام في التسليم.

This is a pure dharma offering, a gift for us to learn from. This is the kind of suffering that we need to hear from. Someone in the heart of genocide, preserving his humanity and taking the time to teach us about suffering.

It seems that all that we've been studying in the dharma is about letting go and surrendering. We learn about releasing control and craving and rejecting our experience to be somewhere else. We speak of suffering and reducing suffering, and here is someone in the middle of death and fire still speaking to us about faith, yaqin, rootedness, and the generosity of god. This is a lived experience he is sharing with us that we need to learn from.

Kareem: When you read these words it felt to me like reading a sutra in Arabic, like the words of the Buddha. This is deep bodhisattva training and sainthood being lived in the midst of hell.

Lubna: You saying this opens a whole door for us about Islam and how we relate to Islam, how the West views Islam and how we end up internalizing that and taking on board their ideas and ways of relating to it based on these projections. It also opens a door for me into how I can find myself learning about the dharma through Islam.

Kareem: I relate to this complex territory you are pointing to. It brings forward all the ways I've overlooked this spiritual essence of Islam that you are speaking about and always looked elsewhere for it.

Lubna: Western dharma and spirituality could really step back, be humbled, and learn something about collective suffering and collective healing beyond our individualistic frameworks. There is so much to be learned about what collective healing and collective resistance look like in practice from people facing genocide.

Tawakull, Refuge, and Courage

Kareem: I find it so profound to hear these parallels with the dharma and the unique expressions of them. Especially this point of tawakull, a reliance and refuge through which we can let go and surrender, as Ahmed expressess it so powerfully.

Lubna: Let us share some more of Ahmed's words on tawakull and surrender:

"Tawakull (reliance on God) is the fruit of surrender. When faith in God permeates your feelings, experience, and entire being, you surrender to Him because you trust his plan and management. By surrendering your will to Him, you are in a state of complete reliance on Him, which is the essence of tawakull."

التوكل ثمرة التسليم . حين تؤمن بالله إيمان شعور ومعيشة وتجربة تسلم أمرك إليه
لأنك تثق بتدبيره وحين تسلم أمرك إليه تتوكل عليه

"Peace, surrender, and Islam are one and the same, sharing the same linguistic root in Arabic. To Him has submitted all that is in the heavens and the earth."

السلام والتسليم والإسلام نفسه " وله أسلم من في السموات والأرض

"Surrender, in the spiritual sense, does not contradict the concept of struggle. Surrender is the opposite of anxiety and confusion and should not be equated with negativity or passivity."

التسليم بالمعنى الروحي لا تتناقض مع معنى القتال ..
التسليم عكس القلق والتشتت وليس مرادفا للسلبية

Kareem: It's powerful that all these words—peace, surrender, and Islam—come from the same root "Islam, Tasleem, and Salam." This is such a profound teaching on the deep surrender of the self on the path of struggle and resistance; it's not a passive surrender, but one that brings forth the faith and guidance to be rooted and steadfast in crisis.

Lubna: Surrender is not opposed to action. It means having freedom from internal conflict and disturbances. It's the opposite of despair. Surrender leads to determination and courage. When you surrender to god, or the universe, or mother earth, you are guided to take the right actions, and you won't fear the consequences anymore. You will not even fear death or losing your job. You are in full surrender to your truth, your faith, your values as well as to your humanity and standing with your brothers and sisters in the world.

Choosing the path of activism requires acceptance of whatever might come your way along with a surrender to the price paid. There is a deep commitment and confidence in our principles and values and what is possible when we are aligned with right action.

Kareem: This is such a deep and pure expression of the bodhisattva path, to dedicate one's body and heart to the protection of life. When I operate from this place of refuge and faith, I go beyond any ideas of what I believe my capacity is. It takes us beyond that limited sense of self that we try to manage and care for.

Lubna: It does not mean there is no fear. Fear is always there, but it's not what shapes and drives our actions anymore. There is a confidence and protection in this place of agency that we can act from, even if we take risks that expose us to danger and violence.

To be honest with you, my biggest fear is of a day ever coming that I step down and give up on my values, principles, and struggle. That a day could come that I stop resisting injustice and lose connection with the spirit that guides my resistance every morning I wake up. For me, this is my defeat. It's not the smaller, physical death of the body. This would be a much bigger death, the greater death of my freedom. The death of the body is a smaller death.

The Refuge of Faith

Lubna: Let us share some final words from Ahmed on faith as a refuge:

"I see many people in Gaza and in other places that have an amazing mental determination, a determination in the way they face traumas that cannot be explained through materialistic reasons.

For example, I lost a son, but others, mothers, have lost four sons at once or lost all their children. You have merchants that have lost all their life savings, 1 million dollars, or five million dollars and now they cannot find the money for a meal, so the determination to face these traumas and these violent shake ups cannot be explained other than through reasons that are higher than the material...faith gives you a vision, a vision that offers you relief and tranquility and satisfaction.

Faith does not change the reality, meaning that now, for example, my son Aboud will not come back to me. All of those people who have

been hurt, their faith will not bring back what they have lost, but it does give them mental balance and vision...

In one moment a person can lose everything. In 1 minute my house was gone, which was my lifelong dream. A bullet, a rocket or a virus can destroy a person; therefore the ordinary life is fragile, so for a person to hold on and withstand, they will need to believe in another dimension, and this other dimension tells them to not put all their weight in this life. The trauma is proportionate to the strength of the attachment. A person's trauma becomes big in times of loss if they have a strong attachment to this life. Here is the value of the faith. Faith is not an anesthetic as it is described to be, but the faith is what saves you in these difficult times. The difficult times affect all people—not only the people of Gaza, but also people who live in Finland, Paris, China. They, too, all go through traumas..."

Lubna: What do we know about rootedness and faith? Many of us face any changes to our sense of security and material comforts, and we can be totally shaken. These are the places Gaza has stretched, humbled, and liberated us. I know people in Gaza more than any other place in Palestine. I speak to people who don't have food, who haven't eaten all day, those sleeping under bombs all night, someone in Jabalia whose brother was killed while trying to fix a water tank.

Many Muslims and believers around here have been saying that our understanding and faith is so limited compared to the people of Gaza. We know and understand so little about iman in comparison to them. They have taught us a real lesson on faith that is built on yaqin. Yaqin is not the kind of faith that some of us were brought up with, based on remorse and fear of Allah, in which we learned to say *bismillah* when we feel scared or when there is danger. No, it's the iman that is rooted in truth and justice, a faith in truth and in knowing. With that I am free in this life.

Kareem: Living from this place of trust and yaqin is also an embodied state of care and love. It's an expression of pure spirit with qualities of reverence and beautiful relationships. It's a resistance rooted in love that preserves the sacredness of life. Gaza is showing us what kind of spirit is possible in these circumstances.

Lubna: This reminds me of when the people who were displaced to Rafah opened tents that became eye clinics and barber shops and some volunteered

to teach children, perform as clowns, and guide creative arts. There is a desire and appetite for life, a connection to life that is deeper than destruction, death, and these weapons of mass destruction from the West. It's not just surviving but a full rejoicing in life.

When we talk about these stories where people are building life out of extreme circumstances and not giving up or losing hope, it really brings home the larger view of how Gaza is liberating us. We truly understand and can experience the value and gift of life. What made Ahmed reach this place is the reality that we really have nothing to hold onto from the material world in this time. Our assumptions about international law and human rights protections have completely dissolved.

Kareem: This leaves us with no choice than to return to a refuge in truth and stay in connection to this spirit.

Lubna: For me, I've been liberated from this idea that life is the most valuable thing. There is also sacrifice. Death is not the end; there is a bigger story here than whether we live or die. There is a deep value in justice, freedom, and ending oppression even if it takes our lives. I feel this liberates me. What can Israel take from me? My life? But it can't take away my faith and yaqin in justice, in ending oppression, and in realizing full liberation for my people and rights on the land.

Kareem: Yes, and for all the people, no matter how much is destroyed, it is not the end. The spirit still shines through and continues. This can never die or be taken. Living from yaqin brings the response of sacrifice naturally. The larger vision for liberation is strengthened when one sacrifices for it and is devoted to it. Collectively, the vision and spirit of this grows and strengthens. It's like growing a seed into a fruit-bearing olive tree.

Lubna: Yes, it's like a spring that keeps giving; you give, and it expands. I practice for myself to have more courage based on faith and determination. We have reached a whole new stage and chapter in this genocide and a new level of threat and insecurity that we live under, including increasing fascist laws, no limits to settler violence, and war expanding into Lebanon.

This calls us to take refuge in confidence, strength, and yaqin. It calls us to hold the view that this is just a stage in the larger struggle and story. When we are in pain and fear, we think it's eternal. The magnitude of violence and oppression we face and the large-scale support for weapon supplying makes us

feel like we're in a place of total darkness and that the pain is eternal. In this place of darkness yaqin is essential; it can help us see beyond this moment in time and to see it only as a stage. We all know as Palestinians that this will not be our fate forever, but we need lots of faith and determination to see this. This is the larger view that no oppression continues permanently; this mysterious faith can hold us and protects us in our struggle to keep going.

Kareem: Phew...this is the larger view that Ahmed was speaking about as well as this place of not being too attached to this material reality. Lubna, thank you for this journey we've taken together, I'm speechless.

Lubna: You know, I find it really interesting that you came to me to talk about yaqin, and I feel, with your insistence on exploring this topic, that this is something that came through you to tell me because this is something I need to remember so badly, and you are bringing me closer to it.

Kareem: And in your reconnection and remembering of it, you are also transmitting it to me! As soon as I heard about the concept of yaqin, I thought of you immediately. I thought, yes, this is Lubna, and this is where you live from. I knew I wanted to explore this with you, and it came from a deep urgent place. Thank you so much for these conversations. I hope they serve to bring us all closer to a yaqin that protects us and helps us to continue with trust in goodness and fearlessness.

LUBNA MASARWA is a Palestinian journalist, meditation teacher, and spiritual activist based in Jerusalem. She has been involved in actions for breaking the siege in Gaza for over a decade. She has managed big teams of journalists in Gaza and the West Bank for the last 10 years. She is inspired to co-create a revolutionary dharma for this historic time, for people living through war and genocide.

KAREEM GHANDOUR is a Lebanese/Palestinian teacher, facilitator, and artist based in the UK. His teaching is inspired by contemplative creativity, ritual, and devotional practice. He has worked with youth and in mindfulness based education projects for the last decade, including serving

as managing director for iBme UK. He is a co-founder of the Sacred Justice Coalition and the SWANA+ Sangha, co-creating new dharma cultures to meet times of genocide.

ENDNOTES:

1. For examples of Ahmed Abu Artema's published writing, please see "My Year Under Fire as a Peace Activist in Gaza," published in Time (<https://time.com/7081345/ahmed-abu-artema-israel-airstrikes-gaza/>) as well as "Why did Israel kill my son?" published in The Electronic Intifada (<https://electronicintifada.net/content/why-did-israel-kill-my-son/39726>).



Love in Times of Khibezeh

BANAH EL GHADBANAH

خبيزة **khibezeh**: common mallow, antimicrobial, wound healing, nutritive, demulcent, respiratory healing

Nana with the green eyes & golden rim glasses pulls over the car when she sees khibezeh: time to gather! & we do, in plastic bags full of kibbeh crumbs from earlier. In Gaza, Maryam al Attar writes, I can't find bread for my children. I go & gather khibezeh. We have found khibezeh for now, but in the future, where will we get it from? Khibezeh will run out. Where do we turn? The New York Times calls this "battling wartime hunger,"¹ not forced starvation. Other news outlets say "Gazans eat grass."² How would they know our people have eyes for khibezeh, for foraging, for shades of green? We know the land like we know our lovers, the promises of rain, the leafy, springy taste of home.

شونيز دمشق **love in a mist / nigella damascene & her sisters:** anti cancer,
helps with fatigue, supports mood disorders, protects the liver, heart, &
stomach, protects all areas wounded by war

In Oakland, love in a mist grows
everywhere. it blooms under freeways
in tent cities where houseless neighbors
make home under bridges & call out
to cars who don't hear, won't hear
their words. they shout: watch out!
You're going the wrong way! Another
tent massacre takes place in al-Mawasi
where zionists kill twenty-one Palestinians
after telling them to flee & houseless neighbors
make homes next to martyrs, binding
white plastic bags while the fires rage,
unyielding, & nigella damascena, with
its soft blue petals, shoots its hard black
seeds into the earth to survive yet another
displacement.

قرفة **cinnamon:** blood sugar regulation, postpartum support, menstrual
support

Teta quizzes me in case of disaster:
what do you do when your neighbor
gives birth & there is no water?
40,000 new babies have been born
in Gaza since the genocide began in
October. The zionist entity bombs
western Rafah. The Indonesian,
Kuwaiti, & Emirati field hospitals
shut down & women give birth
without water. If there is no water,
Teta instructs me, give her cinnamon
bark to chew on. I remember her
advice: it will warm her womb.

Ancestor wisdom at the end
of the world, language that means
you will find a way to make it,
to take care of each other, you
will tend to life in times of unspeakable
violence. I remember how many times
her water broke under bombs or facing
the barrel of a gun. I remember the taste
of cinnamon in my gums, a promise of
my future. I remember the constant anxiety that
there will be no water, the burning in
my throat, the newborn crying. I was
her child & her child's child,
the body within the body
the butterfly that carries flowers &
glides along the edges of time.

عنب ورق grape leaf: cooling astringent energy, mineral & vitamin rich,
diuretic, digestive distress, cardio tonic, analgesic, antioxidant

I worked for an herbalist who instructed
me to forage ancestral foods. I found
wild grape leaves swinging down southern
vines. I called Teta on Telegram & of course
she knew how to cook them. They're extra
tough when they come from the forest,
you have to boil them extra then fold
rice & tomatoes & bharat inside then put
a brick on the pot lid, make it heavy!
I remember the border between Jordan
& so-called israel. A teta & her children
stood with a heavy pot of stuffed grape leaves;
it confused the security system which
could not decipher the tightly wound pockets
of rice in tender green skin & we were detained
together with all of our abundant bags of earth.
We, suspected grape leaf terrorists, carried

centuries of yalanji technology & after all
the searching & explanations, the land
remembered us, the naked resistance of our
bodies, our hands inside her flowers massaging
them open, unburying our sorrows,
heaving open the sun.

BANAH EL GHADBANAH (they/them) is a Syrian poet and professor of Comparative Women's Studies at Spelman College. They won the Diverse Voices Prize from Dzanc Books for their first collection of poetry, *La Syrena: Visions of a Syrian Mermaid From Space*. You can read their work in *Mizna*, *Poetry Northwest*, *Bahr Mag*, the *Journal of Middle Eastern Women's Studies*, the *Women's Review of Books*, and more. Their research is on the creative and spiritual work Syrian and Palestinian women conjure during revolution and war.

ENDNOTES

1. Ben Hubbard and Bilal Shbair. "Gazans are Turning to This Wild Plant for Survival." *The New York Times*. April 8, 2024.
2. Mahmoud Issa. "Gaza's Hungry Eat Wild Plant With No Aid Relief in Sight." *Reuters*. March 26, 2024.

Artwork by
Kareem Ghandour





Roundtable: Sacred Grieving, Rage, and Activism

NADIA ABDEL-KARIM, MAIA MARIE, AND
KRITEE (KANKO)

GUEST EDITOR'S NOTE: It was a treat to facilitate this roundtable discussion with inspiring friends and collaborators of mine, and to open these deep reflections on sacred grieving only a week before we all joined together to hold a virtual grief and rage circle for our international SWANA+ sangha. Maia, Kritee, and Nadia all carry rich experience of working in grief spaces and ceremonies, and in this dialogue each of them bring their own experiences and expressions, based on their own ancestral, cultural, and spiritual lineages. We explore how expressions of sacred grieving and grief and rage rituals fit into this larger practice of *sumood* and sacred activism. We explore sacred grieving as a portal to ancestral healing, guidance, connection, solidarity, and more.

—Kareem Ghandour,

Kareem: We're going to explore grief and rage as expressions of *sumood*, and grieving practices as sacred responses to this moment. I'm excited to hear from you and the different spiritual and ancestral lineages that you bring.

How do you see grief practices and sacred grief and rage spaces as expressions of *sumood*?

Kritee: First thing I want to say is that *sumood* is about love. Love for the land and love for people, plants, and all beings. Grief is also absolutely about love. I always say we wouldn't grieve if we didn't love. Then the different shades, the emotions you mentioned, rage or fear or not knowing where to go, they all also

come from love. So we need clarity around spiritual resistance and solidarity: how do we act from love? Because grieving is a parallel process that needs to happen maybe in a spiraling way. You grieve and you take action; otherwise, the emotional energy will clog us from doing what needs to be done. I feel like sacred grieving is an integral part of sumood, sacred activism, and sacred resistance. In some Buddhist lineages, Theravada especially, grief, anger, rage, and fear can be seen as defilements, things to stay away from so we can stay in equanimity. But the tantric Tibetan indigenous versions of Buddhism see grief, rage, and fear as deities to be embraced fully so we can reach enlightenment. So if grief and rage are deities that help with waking up, then grieving and raging can be awakening actions and awakened actions in themselves.

Maia: I was exactly thinking the same thing: grief is love. That's immediately what came up for me, and it's heart opening. It grounds us to the heart in such a sincere expression. When we are in touch with our grief, we're somewhere completely authentic. It's a very powerful space. For me right now, when I think of grief and spiritual resistance, I feel like it's a foundation for spiritual solidarity. What I've been touching into this past year is the collective grief and feeling how my personal grief is a bridge to our collective grief. As a South African of Indian ancestry, I've been witnessing this genocide in Palestine from afar. I feel the grief of my ancestors. I also feel the grief of my land and the genocides that have happened in this land. That grief is a powerful connector feeling.

I feel the grief of my ancestors, their displacement, and their experiences of the caste system and colonialism—the waves that brought them here. I'm feeling the grief of everything that happened here in South Africa, the violence of this land. It's like I feel those energies through my grief; those energies are speaking to me and connect me to the grief of others and to the grief of Palestine. I feel that connection through my grief. I feel that it's a portal. When I've been in spaces with all of you and I felt that grief emerge, I felt the grief in the field. I felt something very potent connecting us. That solidarity is so important. I think for all of us, what's happening in Palestine, to Palestinians, is also our struggle.

It's the struggle of our lands. It's the struggle of our ancestors because we need the solidarity to create a new world, to stop this violence, and to shift things. The grief practice is important for me because it's how we can create a wave, the energy for transformation. Meeting that grief, meeting that authentic power initiates action. There's also work for me with the subtle energies of grief that we might not even see. That is the mystical.

Nadia: It's so nice to receive all that. What comes up for me is the image of grief and love being two sides of the same coin. They're not separate. In the spaces that I've been holding, there's always space for us to come in as facilitators to bring our own humanness. I can be the one holding and the one being held, both by the group and by the energy field that's created.

Participating in grief ceremonies has allowed me to shift the energetic blocks that grief and rage create in my body. The blocks in my chest and heart can cause me to become numb and dissociate, and to feel isolated and cut off from the outer world. It's quite a powerful shift [to release the blocks]. I feel it as a gentle cracking open and coming back into connection with myself, others, and life. The [overnight spaces] and residential [retreats] we've held have been some of the most joyful spaces. After the ceremony, when people have had space to really touch into and express their grief, the connections that are made are filled with ease, love, and depth between people who have only just met each other a day or two before. I remember after the main ceremony on the first residential I'd participated in: we were rolling around on the floor that evening laughing, offering body work, and telling old stories as if we'd been friends for many years. Feeling the support and connection within that, seeing the preciousness, I knew it could be in support of liberatory movements.

Kareem: I'm enjoying these threads developing about how grief and rage spaces are part of the cycle of sacred activism. I can see two ways that we're looking at grief practice or grief and rage spaces: one being part of the life cycle for action and activism and the other being that it's a sacred response in its own right. It could be a channel for the healing of land, or ancestors. It's work done for the collective.

There's grief moving in the subtle realms as you mentioned, Maia. So much happens when we create sacred spaces for grieving while we're faced with war machines trying to force us to accept the normalization of genocide.

One thread, then, is the practical function of being able to grieve and shift the stuckness, and then there's also a spiritual dimension and thread that's less tangible. Can you say more about these two?

Kritee: Psychotherapist and author Francis Weller's work includes categories of grief. There are griefs which we can name, like individual childhood grief or the grief of, let's say, all Palestinian people or all black folks or all indigenous folks. Then there are specific stories that you remember from that grief. If you keep going, there are categories of grief which are in the subtle mystical realm that you cannot put words to. It can be ancestral grief that needs to move through

our bodies. I have done the Dagara rituals and work in Joanna Macy's framework as well as other grief rituals with a teacher from different modalities. Each of them in their own ways touches on both kinds of grief. The grief you can put names to and the stories we attach to it, which, I am hearing you, Kareem, calling the practical uses of grieving. It'll help us heal our traumas and take care of our fight, flight, and freeze responses so that we free up that energy. There is a measurable impact of grieving. Science can measure it and movements can use it. However, these rivers of grief that were stuck in our ancestors, that is the grief of the land or grief of the river, grief of the minerals, so to speak. This is in the second category. They are both needed because we are both beings on a physical and mystical plane according to many traditions.

Maia: When we tap into what you are talking about Kritee—the ancestral, the land—we're opening the connections between us all. I'm initiated in the Dagara tradition, and in the tradition they talk of how all mountains communicate with each other. Of course we know all waters are connected in a very beautiful way. I just like to imagine that whatever river we are closest to flows into the ocean, and all the oceans intermingle; therefore, we are all connected. When we tap into that grief, we are opening that connection.

I think that's activism in itself. It's an act in itself to connect, to open that connection, to wake up to that connection. That's how grief is the portal. The Buddha refers to the holiness of suffering. Our suffering opens us up to our grief. Our suffering wakes us up. We're all suffering from the same thing.

If we think about colonialism and imperialism, which is at the heart of the causes of this genocide, and when we open up to how we share the grief that's caused by it, we're opening to our connections. I have this feeling there's just something beautiful and important in waking up to that connection. We can instrumentalize it for other things, and it's important. A response can emanate from deep listening when we just move towards and are grounded in that true connection with each other. What flowers from that is really beautiful.

Kritee: I absolutely agree that this is a response. I want to just add a one line critique to that. I have seen so many people doing grief work again and again, especially climate grief, but they don't show up to activism. So grief is an action in itself, but grieving is not enough. It needs to be tied to the larger thing. Some Buddhist communities in the United States are plagued with that. White people will sit and grieve forever about species that are being lost, or even about Palestine sometimes, but not build a political momentum beyond that.

In my research, I can see that each culture had these people who cry on behalf of all of their communities: there is *muharam* in Islam, and in Hindu traditions in India, there are *rudaali*, people who are assigned the role of wailing and moaning and screaming on behalf of people who have recently died, including during famines. So grieving and crying are a sacred role. It's like they are screaming on behalf of wherever there is pain to let it out of our system, our collective.

Nadia: When I was preparing for the grief circle that we organized and held for SWANA and Muslim heritage folk earlier this year, I found some papers documenting grief within Bedouin communities, particularly in the south of Palestine. They described ways of grieving, their rituals and practices around it. Professional wailers would be invited in to support, women would take off their hijabs, scruff up their hair, tear the clothes at their breasts, and put mud all over their skin as a sign of their grief. It felt really raw and sacred to read about that. There was also a sadness in me about how I needed to do research to find this out rather than seeing it for myself. In the Arab community I grew up in and still visit, I see some ritual and ceremony around grief in relation to death, but not as expressive as this. Not knowing, not remembering that way of coming together and grieving is a massive loss. I had to re-learn from other traditions and cultures, to whom I am so grateful for, and I'm sure ancestrally it's still within me, this way of grieving, and so I'm remembering through connecting to them also.

Speaking about those two threads we're exploring, I feel like there's less of a split between the two. Tapping into ancestral grief more intentionally over the last year, grief spaces have felt different and viscerally much more intense. It's as though there's something moving through me that doesn't feel like it's just mine, from this lifetime. I remember on one residential retreat, someone had said the word Palestine in the space, and my body started trembling. I was sitting with a friend next to me, who I asked to hold me from behind, and I began wailing and shaking for a good 15 minutes as things moved through me. There was a real feeling that it was something ancient. First, it was intense rage, and then grief; there was power and energy that surged through my body. For weeks after it felt really easy to access that power, a clean source of energy, a resource that could fuel liberatory action. So it's like this grieving for the sake of grieving; honoring our grief for what it is; isn't different from the practical use that we're speaking about.

I want to add that this isn't what always happens, this kind of cathartic experience. And it's not what I'm seeking either. What feel like small expressions have been subtle but powerful, too, and sometimes all I feel is stuck and numb.

Each time I come to these spaces, I come with trust in the process, respect in the mystery. I've learnt to show up with openness, no expectations, and surrender to the wisdom of the spirits, God, Earth—all that's holding us.

Kareem: Thank you, that's so rich. I wanted to bring in something that feels very particular to this time we're in and how we've been living through and engaging with these times of genocide as we approach a year since October 2023. It's been a real process of bearing witness and being so energetically close to probably the most well-documented genocide in history. We feel close to the people, the events, and life on the ground. People have been talking about *sumood* on that level: how do you keep going, bearing witness, and not turning away? That's a thread that connects our grief, having all been together in this process of bearing witness to it all. How has your *sumood* been with this process of staying close to the reality unfolding while moving through cycles of grieving?

Kritee: One thing that I have historically said in grief and rage ceremonies is that our goal is not to re-traumatize ourselves by remembering what we need to grieve, such as childhood trauma or trauma in cultural lineage but to release it to the bigger ocean. I say, one tear in one teacup is a lot, but one tear in the ocean is okay. We all grieve, and we have this grief we share as the whole community. If you are in a community ritual, on a bigger ultimate spiritual plane, you have access to what the Buddha called *śūnyatā*, or *anattā* (emptiness or non-self).

If we are in touch with that infinite vastness, then our tears can be held. We don't want to re-traumatize ourselves. We want to, in terms of scientific language, get out of our fight, flight, and freeze responses and enter, on the spiritual plane, that place of infinity and act from it. With that courage, clarity comes from vastness. The problem here, as Kareem said, is this ongoing nature of not just genocide in Palestine, which is huge enough, but also the climate crisis. People are constantly out of water and power in places like India and South Africa.

Despite my appreciation for beloved Palestinian journalists, I will take a break from this news for two days a week. In the first three or four months of this war, I was constantly consuming news at every hour because I felt obligated. I wanted to be in solidarity with Palestinian people who were putting their lives online to collect this information and bring these images to the public. However, I was incapacitated with depression. So what I'm saying is, we cannot keep watching that all the time. We cannot keep watching that every hour of

every day; we must create breaks. Grief rituals and ceremonies are not going to be enough if the stimulus is coming to us in that ongoing way.

Nadia: After feeling so much overwhelm and panic and exhaustion, I have started to question that message we see on Instagram so often that we all need to bear witness. Who is that message for? As a Palestinian, I remember growing up with the Arabic news channels on TV in the background all the time, with graphic images and horrific stories. I know what's happening. My parents and ancestors lived it, and I know it. It's helpful to keep up-to-date and to honor people by witnessing of course, but not to constantly be exposed and filled in with all the details. I started to ask friends to send me short voice note updates with what I need to know, the latest news stripped back to the facts. Now I feel like I've gotten to a place of being able to go to the Al Jazeera website for updates, limiting myself to three times a week. It's an experiment to find what works for me at different times in order to see and bear witness within my capacity.

I love this term that my teacher has: "grief hygiene." When I'm doing my grief hygiene, I let the energy move through so I'm not just stuck, holding onto it, and not able to respond.

I've been having conversations with friends who also hold grief tending spaces about ways of creating peer-to-peer grief tending networks so that the work can grow beyond needing "expertly" held spaces within workshop culture and move it more into monthly or weekly [held spaces] within our local communities, or even a daily practice for ourselves. Social Imagineer, multi-disciplinary artist, and somatic practitioner Camille Barton has created a great online toolkit with ideas on how [we can] bring small grief rituals into our communities and the lives we lead, how can we bring in ritual and ceremony in our routines? I think would be a great support to the ongoing nature of the genocide in Palestine.

Maia: I appreciate this conversation about bearing witness and what it means. Bearing witness doesn't necessarily have to mean consuming the news all the time. It's about the orientation of the heart. I know I can't divorce bearing witness to Palestine from bearing witness to the multitude of oppressions and violences in my own country. It's all connected because that's what it means to open the heart to injustice, oppression, grief, and suffering. What supports me to be a witness is to do what I can. If doing what I can is supporting and holding grief spaces, then that's what I do. I do what I can, and that helps me

to move through it. I have to do something is what I'm saying. I have to do something.

It goes back to what Nadia said: there isn't a division between these two different kinds of work. It's important that we see the intermingling because if I don't do what I can, that's when I feel overwhelmed. But if I do offer what I can offer, that helps me to keep my heart open. There's wisdom in seeing and accepting that. Then, as Kritee and Nadia said, acknowledging how expression of grief can be connected to the capacity to feel joy is so important because, as I'm saying it now, I'm acknowledging that this didn't feel so possible for me even a year ago in my own life and my own being. In the past, I would move into a much bigger overwhelm with the various griefs I feel for all the things in the world. In my practice now, I'm cultivating this ability to offer what I can and then I live my life with joy, knowing that within that my heart is held open to the world, that this is not a closing down. It's important to also name that experiencing joy is not a closing down to suffering, but rather that these two necessarily exist alongside each other. Can our joy also be an offering to each other, not just experiencing the grief and struggle together? Can we also offer our joy to each other?

Nadia: My friend and teacher Sophy Banks talks about how grief and praise are two wings of a bird, and we need to work both to actually fly properly. To grieve together and appreciate together, loving and praising life, giving thanks.

Kareem: Thank you, that's a perfect bridge to the final question. How can we humbly receive so much wisdom from Gaza about life, grief, and joy? In the midst of the horror of the last 11 months, what do you feel are the most important spiritual teachings we are learning right now from the people of Gaza and their sumood? Perhaps about sacred grieving, life, and liberation?

Kritee: While we bear witness from afar, it's important to see how Palestinians are continuing to circle around each other. When a child is killed, they hold the mother or the father or whoever is alive. They still cook, sing for the children and dance; they still tell stories and have weddings. There is so much resilience there. No amount of dharma talks can bring you to that level of your lived experience collapsing. Everything around Palestinians has collapsed, and yet they still have children running on the streets with pure joy, even if the next moment, they might be shaking with terror. One thing that Palestine has strongly taught us is a deeper perspective on the role of the collective to psychotherapy. In contrast to the hyperindividualism of the West, Palestine is teaching us how

to be a community in the midst of genocide. Individual organizing has always been inadequate, and as all these crises unfold, including climate change, we have to be a collective grieving or taking action or whatever. So that's another big teaching.

Maia: What we are seeing in Palestine is the incredible capacity of the human heart and the incredible human capacity to strive for life, to keep moving towards what is life-giving. It's deeply, deeply, deeply humbling.

Nadia: I agree with what's been said. I also think knocking this idea that individualism is the way forward is essential. I remember being so self-critical about needing others to help me process my grief that I began wondering if something was wrong with me and trying to "fix" myself to make sure I can process everything alone. Seeing through that now, I realize I do not need to get to this point where I'm a "solid individual" that has no needs. Individualism, especially in this world where we are witnessing and experiencing so much horrific violence and harm at a rate I don't think our bodies have evolved for, is emphasizing how much more we need to find, build, and be with our communities. We need to strengthen community care, where we tend to our relationships, where we can laugh and play with one another and hold each other.

Kritee: In the face of this hyper-individualistic, western, capitalist model that's driving us to extinction, Palestinians are showing us joy, resilience, and ways to live in a way that honors the ancestor called Earth.

KAREEM GHANDOUR is a Lebanese/Palestinian teacher, facilitator, and artist based in the UK. His teaching is inspired by contemplative creativity, ritual, and devotional practice. He has worked with youth and in mindfulness based education projects for the last decade, including serving as managing director for iBme UK. He is a co-founder of the Sacred Justice Coalition and the SWANA+ Sangha, co-creating new dharma cultures to meet times of genocide.

MAIA MARIE is a healer and a storyteller who lives and loves at Dharmagiri Sacred Mountain Retreat, which she co-guides, in the Southern Drakensberg Mountains of South Africa. Here she is a student of the mountains, rivers, and wild beings. Maia has facilitated storytelling, self-expression, and

listening projects with people in schools, NGOs, through art projects and on retreats. She is also an initiated healer within the West African Dagara tradition and is currently training in Somatic Experiencing. Her main aim is to create spaces of gentle holding where we can all just be ourselves.

NADIA ABDEL-KARIM is a British Palestinian meditation teacher and grief space holder. She leads meditation retreats and holds grief ceremonies and rituals. She sees herself as an apprentice to grief, holding spaces alongside her teacher and friend Sophy Banks. She and Sophy are both shaped by the teachings of Sobonfu and Malidoma Some, Martine Pretchel, Francis Weller, and Joanna Macy. She is a co-founder and organizer of the SWANA+ Sangha and Sacred Justice Coalition, an emergent decolonial Buddha Dharma in times of genocide.

KRITEE (KANKO) was born and raised in India by a single mother in the family of a visionary lawyer and Gandhian freedom fighter who taught her to speak up for love and justice. She came to the United States at the turn of the century to start her scientific research on environmental science. Today, she holds the titles and credentials of a Climate Scientist-Educator, meditation teacher, Buddhist Zen priest, and grief ceremony leader. She is the founding spiritual teacher of Boundless in Motion and a co-founder of Rocky Mountain Ecodharma Retreat Center, two nonprofit organizations based in Boulder (Colorado).





Sumud: Each Gen Has Its Gem

DIANA SALQAN

“We have another wisdom: it comes from those who have seen the nightmare of racism and oppression in the banal daylight of the everyday. They represent an idea of action and agency more complex than either the nihilism of despair or the Utopia of progress. They speak of the reality of survival and negotiation that constitutes the moment of resistance, its sorrow and salvation, but is rarely spoken in the heroisms or the horrors of history.”¹ —Homi K. Bhabha

AS A PALESTINIAN growing up in the West Bank during various phases of the struggle, I was introduced to the concept of *sumud*, which embodies many forms and shapes of collective and individual resilience. The resilience of the Palestinian people in the face of adversity is a hidden asset that can be unearthed, molded, and utilized to sustain values a person or community holds dear. For Palestinians facing an existential challenge both physically and culturally, *sumud* has taken on numerous forms and expressions across generations, as I explore in this personal essay. Regardless of any one form, *sumud* signifies our refusal to succumb to oppression and serves as a lifeline for our survival in the face of the significant threat we continue to endure.

The first time I heard the word *sumud* was from my grandfather who survived the Nakba. He often spoke about how vital *Al-Sumud Al-Filastini* (Palestinian steadfastness) is. For him, it was associated with his own lived experience of being forced from his land. My grandfather had to leave the country twice. The first time was when Palestine, under British Mandate, suffered from poverty and neglect following a long period under Ottoman rule. “Hunger and general hardship were only one cause of the dire state of the population.”² Like many young Palestinians, my grandfather found that the best way to earn

money was to try his luck elsewhere. Many Palestinians who immigrated did not return, but for my grandfather, it was a source of pride that he did return and saved enough to buy a piece of land and build a home. It was a precious opportunity in the 1940s. He built his first home in Lifta, a district near Jerusalem; the remains of this village can still be seen near Jerusalem. Sadly, in 1948, this village was attacked, and its residents had to flee. My grandfather left again, and, eight years later, returned to Palestine and built a new home in Ramallah in the West Bank. Sumud, for my grandfather, meant "not-immigrating" or not "leaving," which would have entailed the loss of connection to the land and the history it holds. His resilience and determination to return and rebuild is a testament to the unwavering spirit of the Palestinian people.

My grandfather was very emotional when he told his stories in the diaspora. "Your grandmother and I worked long hours and saved every penny to come back, buy this piece of land, and build this home. This is a struggle about the land. You lose the land; you lose everything: your loved ones, your family, your religion, and your dignity."

The concept of sumud expanded over time, and Palestinians had to adopt more forms of steadfastness. It took on a different attire, facing the same source of conflict: land dispossession. The second generation of Palestinians who were born after the Nakba were the children of those who fled during the Nakba in 1948. These children were born in United Nations-distributed tents and raised as refugees in crowded neighborhoods in the bordering countries of Syria, Jordan, and Lebanon, as well as in Gaza and the West Bank. Palestinians turned these camps into brick-walled homes that gave way to bone-simmering cold, with leaky roofs that dripped stories of sleepless nights as rain pounded the zinc roof. These children, the second generation to survive the Nakba, were born to the traumatized, impoverished, and fragmented families that fled the Nakba, who were first dispossessed of everything.

My father grew up in one of these refugee camps called Al-Amari outside Ramallah. My father's parents fled their home in Al-Lydd, now a city inside Israel, to the West Bank. For the second generation of Nakba, sumud was about enduring and surviving the poverty and harsh conditions of a refugee camp. The collective emotional shock and trauma following the Nakba, along with the physical and cultural loss, needed to be endured and overcome. Like many in Palestine, my father's family molded the pain into a success story. The refugee camps became communities where cultural heritage remained strong. Many were and still are proud to retain stories of their ancestors, food, lineage, folklore, and traditions. My father taught me about the cuisine, traditions, and stories of the city his parents fled in 1948, Al-Lydd, and how that city was a flourishing hub for culture and trade.

Emulating the first generation of Nakba, who fled their homeland and transformed refugee camps into livable and supportive communities, my father, like many in his generation, worked hard to build a home outside the refugee camp to provide better living conditions for the third generation after Nakba, my generation. Their sacrifices and hard work were not in vain, as they provided the essentials so that the third generation could live in less harsh conditions, and thus, we, the third generation, have time to dream, fight for freedom, and ask for a future. They were the stepping stones between what was and what could be.

In 1987, because the third generation could hope for independence and aspire for freedom, the first Intifada erupted and was described by Edward Said as a “clear civil alternative to the Israeli occupation regime” and a “relatively nonviolent movement” that called for freedom, independence, and the right to self-determination.³ And just as my father endured growing up impoverished in a refugee camp, I had to live through the violent crackdown of this massive movement. It was as if the baton of sumud was being handed from one generation to the next, each generation gaining wisdom and privilege to prepare them for the next phase. This passing of the baton underscores the continuity and evolution of sumud, as each generation carries on the legacy and adapts it to their struggle.

My father’s only income at that time was from a small shop near the main square in Ramallah, where mass demonstrations occurred. The struggle began when Palestinians asked for shops and businesses to close their doors as a sign of protest against the Israeli soldiers policing our streets. The Israeli soldiers, as a result, brought giant levers to break the locks and open the shops forcefully. When the Israeli jeeps left the street, the protestors came back and ordered the shop owners to close their doors again. I remember my father running back and forth from home to his shop while carrying an extra lock, trying to avoid any damage to his shop and sole income. After a month and a half passed of lock breaking and bickering about *iftah* (open) and *sakker* (close), the soldiers eventually stopped breaking the locks. Then, shops closed all day and opened on certain days as assigned in weekly flyers. As it became clear to everyone that this uprising was long, the shops started to open on more days and close only on specific strike days. My father continued providing for our family despite his financial woes during these long years. Adding to my father’s ailment, daily demonstrations involved stone throwing, tire burning, bullet shooting, and tear gas, harboring the possibility of damage to my father’s shop or even his life.

Calls for civil disobedience were raised, and national parties reached out to neighborhoods and formed committees to help our sumud, which now meant trying to liberate ourselves politically and wean ourselves from economic de-

pendency. Home education and self-improvement became our tools as we turned to homegrown plants and self-learning. This shift also marked my education about sumud through real life as a third-generation Palestinian born after the 1948 Nakba. I watched as gardens were planted with vegetables, homes became classrooms, local products became a requirement and a symbol for our existence, and walls became our banners for scribbling our rights.

When the Israeli administrative body decided to close down all schools, I found myself feeling bitter and angry because I had lost a routine that all other children around the world had. It angered me that someone dressed in a military suit could have such power over our lives. However, I didn't let this deter me. I joined some of the classes in homes around the neighborhood. The streets weren't all that safe. At any moment, a demonstration could happen involving stone throwing, gunshots, tear gas, protestors running, and soldiers chasing after them and jumping over people's fences. Sumud, for me, was to experience the injustices that feed the resilience and allow a deep understanding of the power dynamics that can be challenged at every corner. I understood that at every intersection under occupation or military rule, one also has the power to say, "NO."

By the time I was in my twenties, shortly after the peace accords, the second Intifada broke out. My generation, the third generation, now adults, had to unleash our inner strength to be resilient and extend the definition of sumud even further.

For us, resilience became more daunting and demanding. A very tragic period in the struggle began. It was the horror of suicide bombings inside the Israeli cities. These attacks spurred an array of restrictive measures that touched many parts of our daily lives: the erection of hundreds of checkpoints, tracking Palestinians active in the second Intifada using their mobile phones, performing sudden and targeted assassinations by Apache helicopter guided missiles, demolishing buildings by F16 planes, and ultimately, the 2002 invasion of the Israeli army into all of the West Bank cities. Another restrictive measure imposed involved cutting off the streets connecting cities and villages by digging large trenches in the roads. This interrupted traffic and forced thousands of Palestinians to step out of their cars and walk through these large trenches to be able to go to work, school, or a hospital. For my generation, then, sumud has meant facing oppression with its sharpest teeth, negotiating death at any moment, and surviving.

In one particular incident, I found myself in a surreal setting. I had to leave the taxi and cross the enormous dug-out road on foot to reach my workplace. But slowly, a growing crowd of people got stuck at the edge of this vast man-made crater. As I approached to see what was happening, I realized that an

Israeli soldier was checking people's ID numbers. It was too late to turn back, as many people had piled up behind me.

People were all around, so close I couldn't nudge in any direction. Everyone had the same question bubbling in their minds: "Why wouldn't he allow us to pass?"

"Just let us pass, man," some mumbled in a low voice. "Isn't it enough that you've dug this trench as punishment?"

The Israeli soldier, green-eyed, dark-skinned, a hefty man, was shouting and pointing his gun at us to comply, but his language was incomprehensible to us. Some in the crowd knew Hebrew and were able to translate this to the rest of us that he wanted to check our identity cards before passing, but he was refusing to do so before we stood in line! If this soldier had known anything about Palestinian culture and *sumud*, he would have known that this was an impossible demand. For us, it was a moment to negotiate and undermine authority, or at least that was the crowd's decision, unconsciously, perhaps.

The crowd squeezed in on me. I couldn't jostle my way out. I remembered that my identity card was in my backpack. Despite the great difficulty, I had to move to get my ID. I somehow managed to put my bag down, disturbing everyone around, and reached for my green-colored identity card. However, the situation grew darker by the minute. Every time the crowd slid closer to the soldier, he pointed his gun toward us, prepared his rifle to shoot, and shouted for order. The crowd then stopped advancing and waited for another appropriate moment to take a few steps forward. I glided with the crowd, feeling my gut grasp my heart and my throat squeeze my breath.

After a while, the other soldiers came down the hill and recognized the gravity of the situation. They decided to let us pass without checking our identity cards to avoid further escalation. Gladly and anxiously, the crowd sprinkled into the crater.

Everything, eve-ry-thing, in an unequal power play, even standing in line, becomes material for unspoken negotiations over whose will may eventually prevail.

I trudged down the dugout road, staring at the other side, imagining what it would be like to get to the other side of this kind of conflict mentality. How much time and how many craters in our human minds need to be crossed to get to a place where the plane is equal for everyone? Is it possible to get to such a place?

Amid unprecedented violence, Palestinian *sumud* is facing a monumental challenge to redefine itself yet again. The struggle for Palestinians has shifted to a battle for physical survival. This version of *sumud* involves similar previous actions such as purchasing and cultivating land; transcending the harsh

conditions of refugee camps; constructing new homes and communities; preserving culture, history, and pride; striving for freedom; and bypassing internal division between the two leading parties. Sadly, as the case is in Gaza, it also involves surviving a genocide and avoiding a second Nakba. For Palestinians everywhere, but especially the people in Gaza and the West Bank who live under immediate Israeli military rule, sumud carries the imprint and wisdom of all previous generations, and we strive to give it a new meaning. Sumud of the three generations has literally been the antidote to superiority and land dispossessions plaguing our conflict until, hopefully soon, the cracks in the wall of dehumanization and supremacy begin to broaden enough that justice is realized.

DIANA SALQAN has learned to cater to human values, examine life experiences, and delicately and aesthetically address political and intercultural issues through her long educational career as a university professor and, more recently, as a writer, blogger, and evolutionary astrologer. She grew up in a multicultural environment and family, through which she developed respect and understanding of other cultures. Diana has received training in Hatha Yoga and Vedic Philosophy, and is now part of the Farashe community, a charity-based yoga center in Ramallah. Diana holds an MPhil degree in European literature from Cambridge University.

ENDNOTES

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2. Rashid Khalidi . *The Hundred Years' War on Palestine: A History of Settler Colonial Conquest and Resistance, 1917- 2017*. (New York: Metropolitan, 2020), 20.
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Extracts from Gaza: Calling for a Dharma Response

KAREEM GHANDOUR, WEYAM GHADBIAN,
AND SARA SHAPOURI

Introduction

KAREEM GHANDOUR

“Don’t teach us about equanimity while they bomb hospitals!”

THREE MONTHS INTO THIS GENOCIDE, dear friends and I responded to the call for mobilizing a global online sangha for people from SWANA and Muslim backgrounds. Our first gathering of the SWANA+ Sangha was a profound historical moment of bringing together so many of us from across the globe into a virtual dharma space. Coming together in our grief and rage has been a deep refuge and space of sanity.

Since moving to the west over a decade ago, I have painfully treaded the moral dissonance and ethical complicity that most Arabs and Palestinians come to find in spiritual communities. The wisdom teachings offered to Palestinians are often encouragements to listen, grow understanding, and extend compassion for the other side, while our realities and experiences are shut down and silenced for the comfort of the centered majority.

The strained push to resume business as usual is now cracking and Dharma teachers can no longer escape the discomfort of meeting these realities as everything around us collapses. Our sangha member Weyam Ghadbian once spoke into the circle that “we don’t want to hear you teach us about equanimity as they bomb hospitals.” Likewise, we also cannot abide by teachers who bypass the reality of living in a country actively funding a genocide.

Many of us feel betrayed and disillusioned by these ethical failures of dharma institutions and teachers to meet this moment with integrity. The amplification of racist and dehumanizing stances has led some of us to leave trusted sanghas to seek and build new community spaces for our healing and perseverance (sumood).

We are co-creating a new dharma culture and paradigm in global solidarity. The following is an excerpt from this webzine published in April 2024 by Sacred Justice Coalition. This publication was written to address the silence and neutral stance that was chosen by many buddhist institutions, leaders and communities throughout the year. The excerpts below are from the section “Reflections from SWANA voices.”

Western Buddhist Dharma Has a Zionism Problem

WEYAM GHADBIAN

IN THE BEFORE genocide time, life was different. Even as a diaspora Arab living a life of relative safety in the belly of the beast, I feel the epochal divide. Before, I could experience joy and contentment for long stretches, amble in nature, talk to trees, and attend meditation retreats. I could be part of healing and spiritual communities, politicized and not. Sure, I experienced the kind of run-of-the-mill existential dread everyone does during late stage racialized capitalism, but it was nothing like the spiritual crisis I face now. Nothing like the fortress of death that drapes heavy from my shoulders. Nothing like this feeling frayed and fried, numb and disassociated, broken, turned inside out, abandoned, confused, and brimming with unexpressed despair.

What they don't tell you about living through apocalypse is that it happens in phases. Fractures occur over time, intensifying until full collapse. Last week over the phone, my mother recounted the fractures during her lifetime that I was too young to remember: the Hama massacre, Sabra and Shatila, the first intifada, the carpet bombing of Iraq, the second intifada, the second invasion of Iraq. I ask my baba who fled Syrian regime violence in the 80s, “Do you remember things ever being this bad?” “No,” he says. “Not like this.” The first big fracture I remember is in 2012 as we watched the Syrian regime turn Syria into a slaughterhouse, meting out a merciless retribution for our peoples' revolution. We watched as the count of Syrian dead climbed from hundreds a month to thousands, as the regime and its allies killed more of our friends, peaceful revolutionaries, and as it created one of the biggest refugee populations in the world. Fractures mount. In 2017, a family friend and activist, Maimouna

al-Ammar, messaged us with desperation from inside besieged Ghouta: “please could someone come here and be a Rachel Corrie?” I was in a natural food co-op, looking at five different kinds of organic apples. How was the world still spinning? How is the world still spinning?

More fractures. I visited Palestine for the first time in summer of 2014, witnessing the non-stop stream of images on the news of children in Gaza covered in blood, wheeled through hospitals; palpable hatred radiated towards me from Israelis. “Where are you hiding your weapons?” the soldiers leered as they detained us at the border. I returned to the U.S. where no one seems to have noticed. The 2020 port explosion in Beirut. Somewhere in there, a pandemic. The 2021 siege on Gaza. I lead a grief circle for Palestinian feminists where someone shares, “I can’t feel a connection to our land beyond pain.”

Personal fractures pile onto structural ones. The sensitive among us drop like canaries in a coal mine. I lost a deeply feeling friend to suicide in 2022. I supported another beloved actively teetering on the edge. In 2023, I lost a young family member unexpectedly and began to experience bouts of suicidal thoughts, new to me. Everything felt more volatile and unmoored.

October 2023: the genocide that broke the camel’s back. My best friend’s husband lost over 40 members of his family within a few weeks. Other friends started to report “67 killed in my family,” “91 in mine.” The depth and breadth of desecration of lives, infrastructure, sacred sites, of the earth—incomprehensible and relentless. I don’t know how to describe it. I can’t. I don’t think we will fully understand what this genocide has done to us as a civilization or as a species for a long, long time.

I was taught by one of my healing teachers that it is easy to magnetize to suffering. Suffering is massive, it is deep, it is endless. She said our role is to find the corollary healing energy, the antidote, which is always available, somewhere in equal or greater measure to the suffering. We have to pray for it, feel for it, look for it, fight for it, build it. For each decade of colonialism, there are thousands of years of deep indigenous relationship with land. For each macro and micro aggression, there is enough love and power to heal it. From where I currently sit in spiritual crisis, this suggestion feels quaint, and inaccessible.

I rack my brain back to a time when I found a micro-moment of sumood. It comes to me from the before times, during a micro-aggression I encountered, though it feels silly to reflect on these small indignities when they have been far surpassed by this past year of retaliatory Zionist violence. I am on a silent meditation retreat in 2019 when a teacher quotes a 1967 Israeli Defense Minister as an example of nonviolent communication in a talk about mindful speech. My whole body burns with protest. Because I am in silence, I am unable to speak or push back or be witnessed by another human. I don’t have

friends or sisters or a mother to call on the phone and vent, “Can you believe he did that?” I have just myself and the earth. I climb the highest hill on the land, and when I reach the summit I remember: the Dabkeh, the harvest dance of our region, the stomp and step and leap hand-in-hand dance, given special meaning by Palestinians separated from their lands. I dance the shit out of that Dabkeh, stomping and leaping and skipping high, high, high and landing lightly, with dignity and poise. No one sees me but the earth. The earth holds me and bears witness, and at that moment, it is enough.

Two other memories of Dabkeh. This year, after a direct action that involved shutting down a major thoroughfare after protestors successfully blocked many lanes of traffic in spite of the intense police presence, disrupting business as usual and passing out leaflets to cars asking them to demand an arms embargo from genocidal politicians visiting the city. It is time to go home, but the cops don’t let us, so we have to walk back down the highway. I grab hands with others near me, and I take off my kuffiyeh and twirl it in the air. We Dabkeh our way down the freeway, the crisp air blowing against our faces, the ocean beneath us, and a big pink sunrise above. I have never felt more free. Another time, I am with a group of activists and healers in Greece who have been working to support Syrians and other refugees and envision a liberated Palestine, Syria, Lebanon, and beyond. We take a break from our overstuffed agenda, and the evening erupts spontaneously into a chaotic, joy-filled Dabkeh. Despite all the flip charts and planning sessions, this is the best thing we do all week.

Dancing Dabkeh in Greece
with my sis and my bro and my sib
electro shaabi autotune zaffeh
psychedelic flashing tambourine
jangly shimmy coin scarf changes hips
no bra floppy unselfconscious living room Dabkeh
jumping up up up
round round round
grabbing hands
breathless
touching earth leaping sky
like never coming back down
like how it feels to fly
in my dreams.

I know that dancing Dabkeh isn’t enough to stop a genocide or right the wrongs of colonialism, but maybe in the energy of these moments there is

some spiritual medicine for these bleak times, a microdose of sumood that can fuel us. May the energy of these footfalls be an offering of joyful resistance, a refusal against the death machine, a small corollary antidote to the pain our people are enduring. May we find more and more of them until they overtake the suffering, ending it, once and for all.

Dharma Shadows on Gaza

SARA SHAPOURI

I COME HERE as someone who is grieving. As I sit now in her home, I grieve the loss of my mother in love, who just passed on Mother's day. It is a pain that makes me want to cry and scream. I had the same urge when I read about 274 Palestinians killed to free 4 Israeli hostages. Hundreds also wounded in a place where the medical system has been intentionally decimated. I grieve the loss of life and freedom, and the lack of love and respect for Palestinians. I also grieve the spiritual and moral corruption of those that oppress them, and I grieve for all of us as we are connected to hundreds of years of colonialism, white supremacy, Islamophobia, and anti-semitism, all which have created this horror. I hope my words offer respect and care to Palestinians and all those who are oppressed.

I feel called to write about Palestinian justice because of the enormity and destructiveness of the power differential and because my taxes are being used to fund a government hell bent on genocide. My country, the United States, provides the weapons that have killed and maimed thousands of innocent people, laying waste to homes, and poisoning the land. No words can capture the ocean of pain, heartbreak, and injustice. What is currently happening and what has been happening to Palestinians is unconscionable and inexcusable. No group should ever experience such cruelty, nor is there some attribute or action that could ever warrant such treatment.

Given the scale of suffering that is readily on display and the Buddhist orientation to the alleviation of suffering, many Western Buddhists feel frustrated by the silence from our institutions and leaders. Added to this context is the reality there has yet to be a reckoning in our sanghas of the hatred, mistrust, and dehumanization of Muslims, Arabs, and other SWANA peoples. Western culture is steeped in othering these identities, and, as with all bias, it is not easily undone, particularly when it is hundreds of years old, ingrained into our society and ignored. To anyone reading this, Buddhist or not, please interrogate

how you have consumed this hatred and accepted that these people deserve to die or be sacrificed so that some group can feel safe or be resourced.

Are you complacent toward our leaders who perpetuate and fund this violence? Does your entertainment include images of Muslims and Arabs in perpetual war—scary, fanatical, and backwards? Have you accepted the headlines in which Palestinians just die and starve with no mention of the full context or the perpetrators? Were you undisturbed by half a million dead Iraqis due to a war based on lies? Do you believe the trope that Muslims “hate our freedom”? Have you questioned who gets labeled as a “terrorist” or the origins of that term when we live in a country that has and continues to terrorize and brutalize so many, both domestically and abroad?

I am frustrated because teachers and communities still fail to include oppression and power in their exploration of Dharma. When we speak of *sīla*, or ethical living, our exploration is incomplete if we do not attune to how power affects and exacerbates our impact. When one talks about suffering or the three poisons externally, but bypasses oppression, not only are their teachings oblivious to real world active dynamics, but, depending on the circumstance, they can also be harmful. Silence is a form of communication that enables and feeds systems of oppression.

Moreover, when one does not include oppression and power in their teaching, one is speaking to the privileged, centering their comfort to the detriment of others. For many of us who are SWANA or Muslim, silence from Buddhists signals we are not included or welcomed. Many of us don't feel seen, safe, or valued. When teachers or practice centers say they are remaining silent or neutral on a “political” issue in order to be a “safe place for all,” please consider that it is the comfort and safety of the privileged that is being prioritized. Calling something “political” can mean one is unaffected. It externalizes an issue, so that it is someone else's problem. But what is politics to one is life and death for another. Death that our tax dollars have paid for.

I am not asking for teachers to make Instagram posts or offer an intellectual analysis when they are not informed or comfortable doing so. However, I have to ask these teachers: how are you practicing with this? Why do you not share your struggle from the front of the room? What is your ethical orientation around relieving suffering from systemic violence and oppression? How does that inform how and what you teach? Does it matter if the taxes paid from teaching dharma fund an apartheid system and pay for weapons used to terrorize and kill? If you are a teacher and you are not including a lens of power and oppression in your own practice and teachings, I ask you to consider the impact of that omission. Whose comfort are you centering and how might your omission contribute to the racist, extractive, and violent status quo?

I understand my role as teacher is to tell my truth as I see it. I am here to accompany others to places of suffering rooted in harm and oppression even if they may not like hearing it. Sure, on a silent retreat you don't need to make every session about the crises of our world, but if you can give a land acknowledgment, or readily talk about climate change, or quote MLK and Mandela, but skip applying the teachings to the current violence that our bully of a nation is perpetuating at home and abroad then you haven't told the full story and aren't doing your job to see things as they are and teach from that place of clarity and truth.

Every -ism, whether spiritual, political, or economic, can be co-opted or used to bypass looking at our own ugliness and capacity to be oppressive. Because of that, teachers have an ethical imperative to point out bypass, both in a student's personal life and in collective spheres. None of us like to think of ourselves as biased, violent, and colluding with power, but that is our habit. Unless we are actively encouraged to look at this habit energy, it is highly unlikely we will be willing to look directly at the horrors of the world. Whether it is socially engaged Buddhists or people who practice for their personal enlightenment, most everyone will avoid sitting with how they as individuals act oppressively, violently, or self-righteously in their personal lives and in their collective relating. Most can name that we are cruel to ourselves but owning how we dehumanize others is easily bypassed. A spiritual teacher has a duty to clearly and directly acknowledge and call in anyone who is promoting or perpetuating oppression, particularly in a climate when our political leaders and media are failing to do so. I hope others will do that for me when I invariably fall into it because, to me, to say the thing that is true, necessary, and difficult to hear is a truly loving act.

The collective failure to end the horrors of Gaza and the continued subjugation of Palestinians shows that greed, hatred, and delusion in the form of violence and oppression is alive and well in each of us. Without diligent effort, these unwholesome seeds continue to grow, manifesting into action that continues cycles of suffering and harm. That is the only way I can understand how this can keep happening.

It is therefore essential to take an honest look at ourselves and our communities to uncover how greed, hatred, and delusion enable the oppression of Palestinians and Arabs. This honest look can inspire our wholesome actions. We can join the call to boycott, divest, and sanction. We can protest, bear witness, pray, call our leaders, donate, and join communities committed to ending oppression and domination. And there are more internal, local actions we can take. We can listen to Palestinians. We can integrate our personal shadow and the collective shadow we in the West project on Islam and Arabs. We can be

vigilant in detecting how we replicate the thing we are trying to dismantle. We can take responsibility for our innate compulsion to make war. We can learn to give and receive feedback. We can support teachers, centers, and communities that include a justice and power lens in their offerings. We can create and build what is lacking in our current Buddhist communities.

The future of this planet and the plight of Palestinians are linked. We are connected, complicit, and bound to the suffering of both. How many dead bodies do we have to sit on? How many amputated limbs of children or tiny shrouded bodies must be buried underneath us before we realize we are not only killing and subjugating innocent people, but the engines that fuel it are destroying the Earth and killing our spirit as well. I pray for our planet to be loved, honored, and respected when I pray for Palestinians and all oppressed people to receive the love, honor, and respect they deserve. Free Palestine.

KAREEM GHANDOUR is a Lebanese/Palestinian teacher, facilitator, and artist based in the UK. His teaching is inspired by contemplative creativity, ritual, and devotional practice. He has worked with youth and in mindfulness based education projects for the last decade, including serving as managing director for iBme UK. He is a co-founder of the Sacred Justice Coalition and the SWANA+ Sangha, co -creating new dharma cultures to meet times of genocide.

WEYAM GHADBIAN is a Syrian facilitator, comedian, and mindfulness and energy healing practitioner based on Ohlone lands in Oakland, CA.

SARA SHAPOURI is an Iranian-American contemplative teacher, artist, parent, and lawyer. A lover of maps and guides to help understand the wildness of human experience, their path and offerings are influenced by Buddhism, Depth Psychology, Indigenous Focusing Oriented Therapy, relational mindfulness, esoteric mystical traditions, and performance art. They endeavor to find opportunities to incorporate ethics, creativity, and the more than human world into contemplation and are committed to interrogating how power and shadow show up in spiritual practice and communities.



What to Bring to a War Protest

YAHIA LABABIDI

Bring a candle
burning in your eyes
to lead the way,

bring a bird
nestled in your heart
to set others free

bring a shroud
large enough to bury
the dead past

bring a flag
spotless and white
to surrender pain.

6/5/2024

YAHIA LABABIDI, of Palestinian heritage, is the author of *[Palestine Wail](#)* and 11 other books. His forthcoming collection of aphorisms is *What Remains to be Said* (Wild Goose Publications).





Excerpt from *The Land in Our Bones*

LAYLA K. FEGHALI

Plants of Lineage

THE PLANTS NATIVE and common to our ancestral lands have a particular affinity to our beings. They encode generation after generation of cellular memory, nourishment, and story embedded deep in the tissues of our own blood and bones. Our bodies, which have been informed and built by them for millennia, recall their flavors and chemistry, their essences and spirits. When we engage with our ancestral plants from wherever we live in the world, they light up these ancient parts of us, transporting us towards these first places inside of us. Our ancestral plants have the capacity to recalibrate us to the lands we mutually come from and its unique imprint of wisdom and resonance as aligned with our own soul's path. They remember us, activating roadmaps encoded in our DNA, and knowings blessed by the ages inside our flesh and bones and the specific ways our ancestors made meaning of life on this planet. They regenerate the soil of our internal universe, quenching the earth we are, reminding us and feeding us in a hue that is familiar and suited especially for us because it is part of our design. Our ancestral plants know us so intimately in fact that their mere presence in our lives can retrieve parts of us so deeply buried we do not even know they are amiss. They record the taken and untold memories of our ancestors and their embedded wisdoms too, because they are part of the source that created and inspired them since the beginning of time. Our plantcestors of lineage are such a foundational part of our cultures and legacies of knowledge, affection, and survival that we would not be who we are without them. To neglect them is to abandon a primordial part of ourselves. To steward them is to bless life forward and back, restoring something sacred

and expansive in its healing and aid, especially for those of us who have been severed from our lands, lineages, or Indigenous cultures.

In my personal seeking to heal and make peace with myself through wisdoms of the land and my ancestors who lived closest to the earth, I have encountered many fractures and gaps of memory and insight regarding our rooted lifeways and understandings, sometimes broken from just one or two generations before. I have experienced a multiplicity of ways my own spirit feels lost, body untethered and stranded, looking for anchorage to guide me. But where my living elders have been unable or unwilling to remember or offer meaningful guidance, where the loss and ruptures of colonialism are simply too deep or long to reach beyond the splintered shards that remain preciously understated in our colloquial lifeways and kinships, the plantcestors and land itself have carried hidden keys towards restoration.

To rekindle relationships of listening and tenderness with ancestral plants has become a profound and pivotal part of my re-membrance and belonging on earth, and my humble homage of resistance to the persistent loss inside our land-based traditional cultures and their stewards to this day—not just in my own lineage lands, but across this earth plagued by colonial violence, ecological destruction, and imperial oppression. Likewise, to tend the plantcestors native to the places I call home in diaspora and motherland alike has ushered meaningful care, beauty, and responsibility, a renewed sense of peace and place in my body and communities, and deep regeneration to the ecosystems I inhabit daily. Tending plantcestors and ecologies of place directly affirms Indigenous livelihoods in a simple but profound act that literally rematriates land and begins to heal colonial ruptures that have touched us all deeply. It is an ultimate act of love and reciprocity to our ancestors and future, the earth, and its stewards' life-affirming cultures globally. Tending our local habitats is an act of love and generous healing that returns us homeward and restores universal integrity in transformative ways.

Original Medicines for Original Wounds: Plantcestral Re-Membrance Praxis

Like the land, our bodies harbor distinct memories. Dismembered and forgotten fragments of the earth's primordial and place-based wisdom leaves a unique residue, a lineage of knowing in each of us that sustains connection and transcends time and trauma. Each person carries their own wisdom and avenues of receptivity and connection, their own personal roadmaps and doorways to

kinship with the plants and life in general. We, like our ancestors, and like every healthy ecosystem on this earth, each have a particular role to contribute towards the integrity of the whole. Our particular affinities and personalities, desires and expressions reveal layers of this perspective and the cues towards the deeper knowledge within. In reflection and exchange that honors one another's irreplicable place and purpose, we have the chance to realize and weave these threads into a tapestry of complex colors and shapes, to unveil and interpret a more cohesive story of meaning, memory, and wisdom that can only complete itself in living breathing unison. To do this work of re-membrance in a circle allows us to restore communally, learning not only through our individual practice but through the patterns and reflections of our ancestral relationships with one another and the lands that give us life. This becomes even more crucial in the scattered context of our displaced and colonized world. In a circle, our beings become an intimate mirror for each other's revelation and understanding. From the vessel of diaspora, we transcend imposed borders, reconnecting from across oceans, continents and lineages in a way that subverts lines drawn between us. We become a recollection of those lost bones, each retrieving a piece of what lies beneath the waters, breathing new life through our ancestral communion. We simply cannot re-member alone.

I call the practice of intentional partnership with our ancestral plants, stories, and earth-based legacies "Plantcestral Re-Membrance," a methodology truly inspired by the plants whispers in my own life as I sought a roadmap for reconnection, communal regeneration, and deeper healing culturally rooted in the earth and my lineages. Plantcestral Re-Membrance is an eco-feminist methodology that engages experiential (somatic), relational, and cultural practice as an avenue towards healing, collective reclamation, and the restoration of generational and place-based wisdom. Our philosophy of praxis incites the assertions of Black feminist Audre Lorde. In her poignant essay "Power of the Erotic," Lorde says:

In order to perpetuate itself, every oppression must corrupt or distort those various sources of power within the culture of the oppressed that can provide energy for change. . . . We have come to distrust that power which rises from our deepest and nonrational knowledge. We have been warned against it all our lives by the male world . . . The bridge which connects [the false dichotomy between spiritual and the political] is formed by the erotic—the sensual—those physical, emotional, and psychic expressions of what is deepest and strongest and richest within each of us, being shared.²

In Plantcestral Re-Membrance, relationship building with land through embodied practice, communal exchange, and ancestral story encourages earthward paradigm shifts, as the central axis of knowledge revelation is returned to

the lived and sensual realms of our miraculous bodies as a source of re-membrance and power. These realms inherently evoke the expanses of generational intelligence that made us, and they reattune us to the dialects of the earth we contain mutually.

In Plantcestral Re-Membrance Circles, intentional and closely held containers engage with cultural familiarities, anchored by but not limited to kinship with ancestral plants. Creative and emergent collaborations support the process of relationship formation and re-introduction to hands-on and multi-sensory ways of knowledge building. This technique re-engages and retrains us in deciphering our somatic compass, reviving internal sources of insight and elemental attunement through the implementation of Plantcestral Poetics. The overly cerebral training of lifetimes immersed in colonial schools and institutions often poses obstacles to embodiment and creative engagement. Through partnering with plants in an experiential and “listening” way first, these less linear senses are reawakened to initiate a deeper process forward inspired by the wisdoms of the land. Participants are provided with basic tools and techniques to recognize and reclaim the unique language and wayfinding mechanisms of their own being, supported and guided by the plantcestors directly. We study how this knowledge and memory is transmitted through communal reflection and reverential space holding; experiential revelation is supplemented by immersion in oral knowledge, medicinal records, regional cosmologies, and dream work to deepen and illuminate our learning. Intentional selections of ancestral plants and stories pair to help reveal original meaning through our bodies and the lineage lands we are a continuation of.

The container cultivated through this work supports the basic resourcing needed to gently reckon with what often dwells in the tender arena of our bodies and bloodlines. The plantcestors are masterful and personalized in the deep aid they provide, while the careful group container offers steady and intimate support for integration as layers of revelation take place. Through communal reflection and cultural study, the parts become woven into meaning that illuminates the whole, and a lexicon of patterns and symbols are realized through the collective body re-membered. Each aspect of the documented, folkloric, and experiential information contributes to the knowledge that emerges within. This work is an intentionally curated dialogue with the legacies inside our bodies and the stories inherited by our lineage lands.

This methodology is a framework capable of supporting numerous cultural re-membrance practices beyond work with plantcestors, though anchoring in their presence aids immensely. It was developed as a way to rekindle memory and deepen ancestral knowledge through embodying land-based cultural expressions such as dance, songs, basketry, textile work, culinary lineages, dream

work, land stewardship, and traditional crafts of endless kinds. Our cosmologies and sacred sites have been pillaged and co-opted—repeatedly desecrated and appropriated by colonial entities that benefit and profit from generations of cultural theft at our expense; it is necessary for us to reclaim the generational axis of knowledge, re-anchoring in our personal and ancestral relationships to place as a primary site of re-membrance. This methodology allows us to do so, while also supporting us to wayfind within the many gaps in memories far and recent retold by our own families, that still find home inside these intersecting realms where our plants (earth), cultural arts, stories, sacred sites, and bodies meet. This intentional and full-bodied re-immersion is part of healing colonial wounding, repairing the earth severance of our communities, re-membling our ancestors, recollecting buried cultural wisdom, and healing personally and ecologically as we do so.

Some fundamental understandings that support this work are:

- **Our bodies are an archive, our bodies are the earth.** Our body, like the earth, is an agent and vessel of generational memory, healing, and primordial wisdom.
- **We must feel to heal.** The body's wisdom is realized through deepening sensory capacity and attunement. Restoring these capacities often requires, but also facilitates, healing on somatic, intellectual, and cultural levels.
- **The earth re-memembers everything.** Relating to land (and our traditional cultures as an expression of it) can help heal our sense of home and safety in our bodies. Through immersing our beings in elemental and embodied cultural practices and places, generational resilience can be realized and re-membered.
- **Stories and their places carry keys.** There are roadmaps and keys in the stories lived and shared by our immediate and distant ancestors, and the places where they dwelled. The plantcestors help unlock their memory in our own bodies, even when we cannot travel there ourselves.
- **Relationships determine life.** We heal and re-member in relationships—to each other, to place, to body/self, to land and lineage. Restoring these relationships is fundamental to healing from traumatic and colonial wounds, and supporting the rematriation and liberation of our world.
- **We are our ancestors.** Lost and fragmented cultural knowledge can be, in some form, revived and renewed through collective embodiment and reflection. As Lakota Elder Leola One Feather once insisted to me, each people across the earth have retained a piece of the larger cosmic

puzzle that can mend our worlds back into integrity. We each must steward our piece, so we can share its valuable part to the re-membrance of the whole.

- **Re-membrance is return.** This work is sacred, holistic, feminist, and decolonial by its nature. It is transgenerational, eco-regenerative, and liberatory. It reconnects us to some of the oldest and most foundational ways our global Indigenous ancestors navigated life on this planet. To be in our bodies with the earth, is the greatest portal to restoration back and forward.

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LAYLA K. FEGHALI is a cultural worker and folk herbalist who lives between her ancestral village in Lebanon and California, where she was born and raised. Her work is about restoring relationships to earth-based ancestral wisdom as an avenue towards eco-cultural stewardship, healing, and liberation. Feghali's methods emphasize plants of place and lineage—or "plantcestors." Her company, River Rose Re-membrance, features a line of plantcestral medicine, education, and other culturally-rooted offerings. Feghali's book *The Land in Our Bones*, documents cultural herbal and healing knowledge from Syria to the Sinai, while interrogating colonialism and its lingering wounds on the culture of our displaced world. The book features her Plantcestral Re-Membrance methodology as an emergent pathway towards cultural repair within herbalism, while engaging nuanced conversations about identity, loss, and exile, and the critical importance of tending the land and life where we are to restore the fundamental integrity of our earth. With it, she has self-published *Plantcestral Medicine of Canaan & the Crossroads*, a visual companion book full of medicinal profiles and gorgeous drawings of each plant featured in *The Land in Our Bones*. You may find it at her website: <https://www.riverroseremembrance.com/>.



Hakurat Al-Bireh: A Return to Our Agrarian Roots

AISHA MANSOUR AND SHUROUQ QAWARIOQ

Ensuring Food Sovereignty in Difficult Times

WE SPOTTED THE CULPRIT! A turtle!¹ For the last couple of weeks, someone/thing was feeding on our crops. The *lubia* pods were all gone. Our first cucumber was marred by nibble bites in its flesh. In this first season of farming a nearly three *dunom* plot of land located close to the middle of town in Al-Bireh, and just opposite the Israeli colony, Psagot, we were learning many lessons in the ways of the land and the surrounding mother nature.

The Hakurat Al-Bireh movement was initiated during the early days of the war on Gaza, back in the fall of 2023. Our entire community was glued to the television watching nonstop in horror at the level of destruction and death happening to our people in Gaza. Most folks in the West Bank are connected to folks in Gaza; they are our relatives, parents, friends, and colleagues. We felt helpless, unable to help our fellow Palestinians in Gaza. Anxiety was and continues to be high. If *they* (the Israeli Occupation) can do that in Gaza, perhaps the West Bank would be next. Already, the UN stated that 2022 was the deadliest year for Palestinians in the West Bank. And right before the start of the war on Gaza, the figures were already indicating that 2023 would be even deadlier for Palestinians in the West Bank than the prior year.

With all of this devastation, a group of active food movement folks met to talk, share ideas, and organize action. Closures were increasing in the West Bank with the start of the war on Gaza. The Israeli Occupation Forces can easily close off a village or an area in the West Bank, and thus there is an urgent need to ensure that every town, village, and city can grow its food needs. A cou-



ple of us based in Al-Bireh decided to focus on our town of residence and establish a community farm as an attempt to ensure food sovereignty locally, as well as a call to others to return to our agrarian roots.

An Agrarian Town Converted

Al-Bireh was once known for its agriculture, producing beautiful red tomatoes in the summer via the *ba'al* method (non-irrigated, rainwater). Our town was known for its mountainous terrain that hosted delicious figs, almonds, and grapevines. Our ancestors lived in balance with the land, harvesting the bounty and preserving what they could for the winter months. This was necessary as resources were limited, and if one did not store the season's bounty, it would be a very difficult winter. Like many villages across Palestine, the poverty endured on the population and led to immigration for those seeking better economic opportunities. Palestinians from Al-Bireh immigrated to the US mainly; however, there are some pockets of Birawis (people from Al-Bireh) in Central America, the Caribbean, and even in Europe. According to Abdel Jawwad, some of the Birawis who migrated during the period of 1919-1947 found success in the US working as door-to-door salesmen and later establishing large businesses. These immigrants were mostly men who lived simply and frugally in the US, while their wives and families remained in the homeland tending to the land. As a result, these men had left their town as poor peasants but later returned wealthy, able to purchase additional land from the poor peasants who did not migrate.²

Unfortunately, similar to other lands, colonization along with modernization and capitalism has separated the people from their land, indigenous knowledge, and culture. While the Zionist colonization of Palestine started before 1948, capitalism and the neoliberal economic policies promoted by International Organizations and the Global North were integrated after the Oslo peace agreement in 1994. With the Oslo peace agreement and the establishment of the Palestinian Authority base in Ramallah and Al-Bireh, their de facto capital, they could not access Jerusalem. The towns of Ramallah and Al-Bireh were transformed in less than 25 years to a metropolitan city, housing Palestinians from all over the West Bank as the majority of the opportunities were in this de facto capital, including government jobs as well as nonprofit organizations and large private sector businesses. Land values quickly spiked, and

peasant landowners soon learned that their plots of land could sell for a good price, anywhere from a couple hundred thousand US dollars up to one million depending on the location of the land. Land was transformed into a commodity to trade and sell to the highest bidder. Today, a stroll through Ramallah and Al-Bireh will reveal the impact as large shopping centers and apartment buildings line many streets where olive tree groves, figs, and almonds once stood. It is important to note that the Birawis who immigrated in the 1960s and 1970s tended to take their whole families with them, leaving no one in the homeland to care for the land, in many cases. This separation from the land, coupled with the enticing prices, led many Birawis to sell to developers seeking to establish large malls and apartment complexes to maximize their profits. Sadly, the landscape has been reshaped by this new capitalist system, leaving us Palestinians in an even more vulnerable state living under Israeli Occupation with little means to ensure we can meet our basic needs to survive, including feeding ourselves.

Food Sovereignty in Palestine



Over ninety percent of food in the Palestinian market consists of goods imported from abroad and the Occupation. A stroll in the *hisbeh*, the main produce market in Palestinian cities, will show that the majority of the products are Israeli; much of these products have failed the quality standards for the Israeli or export market, and thus are dumped in the Palestinian market. It is important to note that prior to the 1948 Occupation of Palestine, the Palestinian economy was mainly agricultural, producing sufficient quantities of high-quality goods for the local needs and exporting the excess to the neighboring Arab

countries. The Occupation has separated Palestinians from their land and agricultural practices, and, with that, our indigenous knowledge and practices are slowly forgotten generation after generation.

The self-sufficient Palestinian peasant farmer who farms their land by traditional and natural means and produces a variety of produce to sustain their family as well as his local community is in decline. Post-Oslo, the international aid system provided by mainly Global North nations to help “develop” Palestine has led our farmers to an industrialized approach to agriculture, focused

on a cash crop that is in big demand in the Global North. The idea is these farmers should be able to increase their income through exporting the cash crop to markets in the Global North. However, these interventions neglect the fact that exporting any product while under a military occupation is extremely difficult and expensive. Further, in order to produce the cash crop in demand by the market in the West, the farmer must use inputs that are foreign; purchasing foreign seeds and soil composition leave the farmer in a constant hustle and eventual debt as the farmer's income is insufficient given the expensive foreign inputs and export process. In these cases, the Palestinian farmer cannot make ends meet and has lost the indigenous knowledge that would ensure sustainable agriculture. The little bits of land remaining in the hands of Palestinian farmers have been used, in these donor-imposed projects, to feed the Global North instead of the farmer and local community. Unfortunately, the international community has pushed the Palestinian Authority to adopt neo-liberal trade policies, which has led to an influx of cheap food imports and left the traditional Palestinian producer struggling to compete in the local market.

On a positive note, the Palestinian food movement has been growing and advocating for food sovereignty in our communities, working to remember our indigenous ways of living from the land, while also establishing small scale farms and promoting farmers markets to support our farmers. Over the last ten years, there has been a demonstrable increase in agricultural cooperatives and community supported agriculture aiming to ensure food sovereignty while maintaining our indigenous knowledge and responsible agricultural practices. With the current war on Gaza, there is a heightened awareness of the necessity to ensure our communities maintain their *sumood*, or steadfastness. Growing food to feed our communities is essential for our *sumood*.

Hakurat Al-Bireh: A Food Sovereignty Experiment



Given all of the above, the need for more food sovereignty experiments in Palestine is critical for our survival. Hakurat Al-Bireh is led by a group of five women of diverse ages and backgrounds who live in the town of Al-Bireh and want to be active in their community. We are embarking on a journey to create a community farm that not only provides livelihood opportunities for these women but also inspires a crucial movement towards self-sufficiency. This movement is essential given the numerous restrictions on agriculture in Al-Bireh and across Palestine. We are hoping to inspire similar initiatives on

the empty beautiful agricultural lands around Al-Bireh, threatened by either the capitalist land grab or by the ongoing Israeli settlement expansion around the area. Our motto is that every *hakura* (plot of land) in Al-Bireh should be farmed sustainably to feed the community and show that an alternative to the imposed capitalist model is possible.

The community farm project aims to address these challenges and kickstart a movement toward self-sufficiency. Our goals include:

1. **Returning women to land:** Providing livelihood opportunities for retired women through active participation in sustainable agriculture.
2. **Overcoming Restrictions:** By adopting organic, sustainable, and community-centric farming practices, we support people returning to the land, preventing the further colonial land grab imposed by Palestinian capitalists' personal profiteering and Israeli settler expansion.
3. **Seeding Self-Sufficiency:** Cultivating a sense of self-sufficiency by locally producing organic food, mitigating the impact of external restrictions on the community's food sources.
4. **Remembering and Maintaining our Indigenous Knowledge:** A return to the land will also support our community to remember and maintain the wisdom of our ancestors who knew how to live with the land/nature and care for it while feeding our community.

The five women, founders of the community farm, meet weekly on the farm to discuss the work plan for the coming week, delegate tasks, resolve issues, and note lessons learned for future seasons. During the summer (2024), we have been able to harvest some of our crops, including peppers, zucchini, cucumbers, okra, and tomatoes. We took a course together to learn how to make natural pesticides and fertilizers. We have a lot of ideas and plans for our community farm. But for now, we are content maintaining the summer garden that we established and preparing the land for the fall and winter seasons.

You can follow the farm on instagram @hakuratalbireh. Photos by Majdi Habash.

AISHA MANSOUR lives in Al-Bireh, Palestine, with her elderly mother, two Baladi dogs, and a flock of chickens. She has volunteered in the food sovereignty movement in Palestine, working to raise awareness to buy local from small farmers, organizing farmer's markets, and, most recently, working with a group of amazing women to establish Hakurat Al-Bireh.

Aisha also volunteers with Farashe Yoga in Ramallah where she teaches a weekly yoga class. You can follow Aisha's various attempts at homesteading and growing food on Instagram @seasonalpali.

SHUROUQ QAWARIQ comes from a background deeply rooted in agriculture. The daughter and granddaughter of farmers, she has been actively involved in organic farming initiatives since 2020. Besides farming in her free time, Shurouq is a Financial Technology and Business Development Specialist with over eight years of experience in tech-related startups and financial technology within the MENA region. Her expertise also extends to seven years in civil society, complemented by an extensive academic background, including an MBA and an MSc in Financial Economics from Queen Mary University of London. Shurouq's professional experience is diverse, encompassing roles as a researcher on areas such as equity crowdfunding and peer-to-peer lending. As Cofounder and CEO of Rumman, she spearheaded the development of a fintech offering seamless wealth management solutions and micro-saving tools via smartphones.

ENDNOTES

1. The culprit turtle mentioned in the introduction was relocated to our neighbor's back yard as he was not growing any vegetables, and we needed to make sure that we would be able to eat some of the vegetables that we were trying to grow. We continue to work humbly on this plot of land and learn from mother nature and her various creatures. Gratitude.
2. Saleh Abdel Jawad, "Landed Property, Palestinian Migration to America and the Emergence of a New Local Leadership: al-Bireh 1919- 1947," *Jerusalem Quarterly* 36 (Winter 2009): 13-33. JQ_36_Landed_Propertyhttps://www.palestine-studies.org/sites/default/files/jq-articles/JQ_36_Landed_Property_0.pdf.



Conversation: Land, Biodiversity, and the Colony

MAZIN QUMSIYEH, ZENA CUMPSTON, AND RASHA TAYEH

AFTER A YEAR of witnessing so much death and destruction back home in Palestine, the density of my grief feels thicker and heavier. As news of the genocide broke and continues to this day, I found myself frantically planting in my backyard in Naarm. I was somewhat unable to speak to people and instead wanted to spend more time with plants. The more lives lost, the more seedlings I planted. The more destruction I witness, the more I yearn to connect with the earth and Spirit.

Sumud is a Palestinian practice of deep connection to land, steadfastness, perseverance, and resistance to settler-colonialism. Sumud is also an insistence on life in the face of genocide, violent military occupation, displacement, and apartheid. To be honest, I haven't found the "perfect" English translation of Sumud. Some words only make perfect sense when embodied or spoken in their mother tongue.

Somewhere in between my rage and grief, there was some good news from a deeply respected teacher, Professor Mazin Qumsiyeh in Bethlehem, telling me the tour we had been planning for him around the continent known as "Australia" will go ahead after all.

On May 9, 2024, as part of this tour and with the support of generous friends and our community in Naarm, Australia, our Beit e'Shai pop-up teahouse hosted an important event on Land, Biodiversity, and the Colony. We welcomed 200 guests at Auntie Alma Thorpe's Gathering Place on Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung Country for a discussion on the parallels of settler-colonial projects occupying Palestine and Aboriginal Nations in the continent known as Australia.

In the following excerpts of our tender conversation on joyful participation, resistance, and preserving humanity, Professor Mazin Qumsiyeh, Barkandji artist, writer, and researcher Zena Cumpston, and myself discussed connection to land and Country, the environmental impacts of colonisation, biodiversity, plant kin, healing the earth, and new imaginaries for reparative futures.

May these generous words be re/generative in these difficult times.

—Rasha Tayeh

On Land & Country

Rasha Tayeh: I remember in my early years of living here thinking to myself: Aboriginal people use the word *Country* quite differently from settlers, and differently again from how I've been taught what that word means since English is not my mother tongue. The word Country is riddled with all sorts of colonial baggage. It references a nation-state or simply refers to land (a place/geography).

I want to start by asking Zena what Country means to you and within Aboriginal knowledge systems as I feel it is a term that's often misunderstood or used in place of Land by settlers/non-Indigenous people?

Zena Cumpston: It's hard to answer because there's so much diversity in our communities. Before colonization first started, we had more than 350 different language groups and we each had our own lores and ways of knowing and relationships—so I guess I can just say for myself what Country means. The simplest way for me to conceptualize what Country means is to say that Country is my *Ngamaka*—in my Barkandji community, Ngamaka is your mother. And so, to me it's the best way of thinking about Country, it is your mother. She doesn't own you; you don't own her. But you have a responsibility to her. And she to you. For both of you to be healthy, you have to have a reciprocal relationship where you never take too much from each other. You make sure you're always giving back as you take. It's a healthy relationship. So, for me, that's what Country is, it's my Ngamaka, and I always think about it as Mother, who I must care for so that she can care for me.

On Necropolitics

Rasha Tayeh: Professor Mazin, in your recent paper, you describe the pre-, during, and post-conflict impacts of militarism on the environment.¹ Can you tell us more about these timeframes in terms of both direct combat and the broader terms of the incremental and consistent slow genocide and ecocide in occupied Palestine that is constantly taking place around these large-scale assaults and current slaughter of the place and its people?

Mazin Qumsiyeh: The logic of colonization is a logic one can analyze, scientifically study—as we do ourselves—but we also need to challenge it! And we need to challenge it strongly.

Because ultimately even if they [Zionists] succeed in destroying all Palestinians...if we all disappear from the face of the earth by a miracle from the "God of Israel"—you would have to live in that environment, you cannot have a destroyed environment and call it life.

That's not life.

On Being Human

Mazin Qumsiyeh: Children provide me with the education of being human because children are born with a curiosity about fellow children.

A white child, next to a black child—3,4,5 years old—do they care about skin color? No, they have that humanity in them already. I don't have to teach them that. Nobody has to teach them that. What happens is the reverse: the adults come and teach them racism, and teach them oppression, and teach them to hate. Teach them to kill, even!

For the life of me, I never understood the kind of education that makes an Israeli soldier point his gun at Hiyam [a Palestinian child] and shoot her in the eye.

What kind of mentality does it take to reach that level?

But I have to remind myself that this is a human being, it's [his] education, not a genetic thing.

So what is our role [as humans]? Our role is to reconnect people with their inner humanity that they have forgotten, their inner childhood if you want. We all must reconnect with our humanity that we seem to have forgotten sometimes. Or will forget.

When I succeeded in convincing oppressors that they are oppressors, it was by reconnecting them to their own humanity that they lost when they were growing up, being brainwashed into a society of oppressors. Even Israeli soldiers who arrested me—and I’ve been arrested many times—I managed to convince one of them, which may not seem like a big success, but it is still important...it took time, and there were even settlers that I managed to convince, it takes time and effort...But they have to shed that shell that’s around their hearts.

On Staying Human

Professor Mazin reflects on what a shepherd once told him when he asked the shepherd: “*Your life must be tough uncle, isn’t it?*” “*Life is not tough; people make it tough!*” the shepherd said.

Mazin Qumsiyeh: What a simple but brilliant observation. Life is not tough; life is easy, people make it tough. There are enough resources to feed everybody, to clothe everybody, to make everybody happy, but some people choose to make it tough for other people. If we wake them up or challenge them enough so that they really have to wake up or suffer the consequences, then we can save this beautiful planet that we share.

And this beautiful planet is impacted by many threats. We have already mentioned climate change—there’s habitat destruction, pollution, overexploitation of natural resources, the introduction of invasive species, and wars. Wars are also devastating to the environment. They cause the destruction of our trees and our rivers and our way of life. There’s a genocide, yes, but there’s also an ecocide, an epistemicide—a destruction of culture and heritage—disconnecting you from your ancestry by meticulous and methodical destruction of potential cultural links that go back thousands of generations.

The best “revenge” is actually getting even in a way that would reconnect us with that heritage of ours as well as our own humanity.

Sumud is a much larger word than people think. It’s not just being steadfast on your land—it’s more aggressive than that. The closest word that I can think of is Mahatma Gandhi’s use of the words *ahimsā*² and *satyāgraha*.³ And that’s what we need to do.

On Healing

I've been thinking and writing about composting and composing while staring into the compost bin in my garden for inspiration, looking carefully at death and decay, while reflecting on the importance of imagination to compose new imaginaries for reparative futures and liberation. Because beyond all the death and destruction we experience and witness every day, and beyond the density of grief that weighs heavy on my chest every day, I need to keep imagining a story for tomorrow. Life goes on because life insists and because life and stories resist erasure.

Rasha Tayeh: Can we heal land/*Country* and preserve biodiversity in a colony?

Mazin Qumsiyeh: Well, we have no choice. What's the alternative? The alternative is we all die.

This planet is dying if we don't heal. We're all going to be up shit's creek, I'm sorry to say. We are going to really be in bad trouble. Nuclear wars are *this* close to us. Climate change, also. Even if there's no nuclear war, if we don't pay attention to what's going on, like the melting of ice caps, warming temperatures, pollution... There are estimates that even in the sea now there is more plastic than there are fish.

I think we have to realize that this not only impacts human life, but it [also] impacts wildlife, all our biodiversity, and all our planet and its potential for sustainability as we know it.

So yes, we can, and we must heal this planet. We must work hard to do it. Whether we succeed or not is another question by the way, but we must try and work hard... People do have power if they choose to realise it, if they choose to band together, if they choose to work together, and set aside what sometimes colonialists like to do which is divide and conquer and pit us against each other.

We work together because it is in our collective interest as a species to work together. If you are a musician, please use music for resistance. If you're a poet, use poetry for resistance. If you're a media person, use media for resistance.

There is no one form or one recipe for success. In fact, there is strength in diversity of methodologies. And so, if there is a bottom-line message I want to deliver tonight it's that there's strength in diversity: biological diversity, human diversity, idea diversity, etc. This is what makes us a healthy society. But this diversity must be directed towards sustainable human and natural community.

Zena Cumpston: If you read the State of the Environment Report,⁴ the fundamental bottom line is that we are on an extremely terrifying trajectory. This Report, which comes out every five years, is the first one that has spoken about Climate Change as “here and now” rather than as “coming.” But [in the report] everyone said that there is so much that we can all do. We can’t fully turn this ship completely around, but we can change its course if we can find ways of finding each other, empowering community, and more than anything empowering Indigenous communities—Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to lead!

If you look at the case studies in that Report, the actions on Country that are having the most [positive] impact on biodiversity are the ones that are led properly—not just in name—by communities on whose Country that project is being rolled out. That is, the people who have the most skin in the game.

I think we have to be really careful about the “doom and gloom” stories... We can all do things. We are a community, and people have power. It’s how we choose to come together as community... and all we have to do is care for ourselves, for each other and for the environment, and we will make a difference. And we can, *we can* change the course of this ship.

Rasha Tayeh: I closed the event with these concluding remarks:

Thank you both for such a generous and generative space we created together here this evening. Thank you for trusting me to host this event and hold this space with and in community to reflect on our joint struggle against settler colonies.

I draw most of my inspiration from my relationship to land and biodiversity and contemplating the relationships within an ecosystem. When I think of resistance, as Zena and Professor Mazin said, there needs to be diversity in resistance.

A friend recently said, “*some of us fight and some of us write*,” and that really stuck with me because I’ve been thinking about this new imaginary, this reparative future and our liberation and how we need to keep writing and composing our story into existence.

So, whatever you do in your lives, keep talking about liberation.

Until we get there.

Acknowledgements

It was an honour to have this conversation with Zena Cumpston and Professor Mazin Qumsiyeh, and a great responsibility to facilitate this event and make it ac-

*cessible to guests. I'm deeply grateful for the opportunity for our team at Beit e'Shai to host this event independently, with the support of our community crowdfunding campaign, which also helped us raise funds for the Palestine Museum of Natural History and the Palestine Institute for Biodiversity and Sustainability in Bethlehem, occupied Palestine and *Pay The Rent*⁵ in Naarm, Australia.*

RASHA TAYEH is a Palestinian artist, researcher, nutritionist, herbalist, and founder of Beit e'Shai Teahouse (currently based in Naarm). Rasha's experience spans across working in the arts, public health nutrition, teaching sociology, and researching food sovereignty and food systems both in Palestine and "Australia." Her practice is land-based, focusing on telling stories about food and plant medicine across various mediums, including photography, sound, film, words, and live art. Rasha is interested in the space where art and health intersect; preserving food histories; exploring connection to land, food, spirituality; and people's relationships in community and ecology.

ZENA CUMPSTON is a Barkandji woman with Afghan, Irish, and English heritage. Zena works as a writer, artist, curator, and researcher. She was co-author of several chapters of the Federal government's 2021 State of the Environment report and is a co-author of *Plants: Past, Present, Future* as part of the First Knowledges series. Zena's multidisciplinary practice is centered around protecting and celebrating Country and community.

MAZIN QUMSIYEH IS a Palestinian scientist, researcher, teacher, and author based in Bethlehem. He is the founder and director of the Palestine Museum of Natural History and the Palestine Institute for Biodiversity and Sustainability. He has published a staggering number of scientific papers and scholarly articles and several books, including *Sharing the Land of Canaan* and *Popular Resistance in Palestine: A History of Hope and Empowerment*. His writings focus on the environmental impact of colonization, environmental and climate justice, cultural heritage, human rights, biodiversity, and conservation.

ENDNOTES

1. Mazin B. Qumsiyeh. "Impact of the Israeli military activities on the environment." *International Journal of Environmental Studies*, 81(2), 977–992. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00207233.2024.2323365>.
2. *Ahimsā* is the principle of non-violence and compassion towards all living beings, central to Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism.
3. *Satyāgraha*, a term coined by Mahatma Gandhi, is the philosophy and practice of nonviolent resistance to injustice, emphasizing truth and steadfastness in the pursuit of social or political change.
4. Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water. *State of the Environment 2021*. Australian Government. Accessed November 26, 2024. <https://soe.dcceew.gov.au/>.
5. Pay the Rent. "Pay the Rent." A grassroots initiative supporting Indigenous sovereignty through voluntary financial contributions. Accessed November 26, 2024. <https://paytherent.net.au>.



The Eclipse

YAHIA LABABIDI

Where were you
during the apocalypse
on the other side
of the world?

Did you pause
to observe
a moment of silence?

Did the extermination
of the other half
interrupt your sleep?

Did their absence,
somehow, disturb
your festivities?

Did you notice
the eclipse
is here to stay?

2/19/2024

YAHIA LABABIDI, of Palestinian heritage, is the author of *[Palestine Wail](#)* and 11 other books. His forthcoming collection of aphorisms is *What Remains to be Said* (Wild Goose Publications).

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