

THE RISING OF THE LIGHT, SUMMER IN ISRAEL AND THE OCCUPIED TERRITORIES OF PALESTINE: A REPORT

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*Dear God, when I am wrong, please make me willing to see my mistake.
And when I am right – please make me tolerable to live with.*

—Desmund Tutu, his prayer as paraphrased by Uri Avnery

I begin with gratitude: gratitude to all those who have supported my 5th journey to The Land of Discord and Possibility. Those who have noticed, commented, prayed, criticized, contributed money, offered leads, taken action; and especially those who have followed my voluminous dispatches thru my website and blog. Without you I am enfeebled, a stay-at-home elderly recluse, retired to the land of imagining what I might have done, if-only-I-had-the-time. Gratitude to the Palestinians and Israelis who expedited my photography, providing leads, background, context, introductions, insights, analysis, friendship, housing, food, and, yes, love. And gratitude for the simple good fortune to live such a free spirited life—thanks to community, family, some mysterious, congenial, rebellious quirk, and muses.

Half way thru my recent three-month (June 7 - September 13, 2009) journey of discovery, I wondered, what had I discovered? In mid August while in Gaza, I listed all that I'd not photographed: Canada Park in Israel which erased an Arab village; the route and story of water from the headwaters of the Jordan River to where it disappears between the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea; non violent resistance, in Bil'in where I'd been several times earlier and finally to Nil'in which I'd read so much about; Quakers, but how to photograph more than the Quaker Palestine Youth Program in Gaza when the Ramallah Friends School is on vacation; and most vitally—an urge I've felt for several years—Israel itself, Jaffa, Tel Aviv, the Mediterranean Coast, West Jerusalem, the Golan and Galilee, visiting friends, pretending to be an Israeli, feeling what they might feel, immersed in the possible cognitive dissonance of living on a land expropriated from native people.

Here I felt some resonance with my own experience in the United States—living on land stolen from American Indians, profiting from labor supplied largely by captured Africans. Yes, I had some first hand experience living a possible lie, captured by a self-serving narrative. But how to do this in Israel-Palestine?



The platform built for the Pope's summer 2009 visit to Bethlehem, occupied Palestinian territories—Israel prohibited its use

After this dismal accounting, all that I'd hope to photograph and hadn't yet even visited, I made another list (remembering how Rachel Corrie loved making lists), this time of what I had at least partially achieved: 2 weeks in Bethlehem exploring its Aida refugee camp while coaching a young novice photography teacher at Al Rowwad Cultural Center in the camp; 2 weeks in Jenin, investigating its refugee camp and the wondrous Freedom Theater, while teaching photography to high school age youth at the Jenin Creative Cultural Center; several stories about hydropolitics, including a spectacular trip to one of Ramallah's own water sources, Ein Samia village about 20 km north of Ramallah; the Popular Education Festival in Ramallah of the Quaker Palestine Youth Program; construction by



Ramallah Friends School, September 2009



Bethlehem, June 2009





Jerusalem Old City, September 2009



Sheik Jarrah neighborhood in East Jerusalem, nominally Palestinian, formerly the home of the Hanoun and al-Ghawi families



Israeli intelligence center, Golan Heights, September 2009

hand of a series of stone walls at the Ramallah Friends School (not as exciting as photographing the children but stones were present, children were not); the new light rail system in greater Jerusalem snapping up Palestinian land in East Jerusalem; Gaza, from finally getting a permit, living there for one month while photographing the aftermath of the vicious and possibly criminal Israeli assault to teaching photography thru the American Friends Service Committee and Al Aqsa University; exploring the coastal region from Gaza north to near Haifa, with a stop in Sderot (the Israeli town suffering extensive trauma from rockets fired by Gazan militants); two weeks in the Golan Heights and the Galilee, a long held dream to trace water; and Jerusalem's Old City and environs, culminating in my final day's journey when I strolled thru the Old City making hip pocket photos with my new 85 mm lens. Adding to this unexpected achievement, I discovered the family I'd read about in the Sheik Jarrah neighborhood of East Jerusalem who had been brutally evicted from their home.

I felt better, but not complete. Will I ever feel complete. Will I ever feel I've finished this project? What drives me besides a possibly inscrutable compulsion?

Perhaps, perhaps: the outrage I feel at such blatant exploitation of the holocaust and victimhood by some Jews and many supporters of Israel, the complicity of my government and my country's media, the drive for justice, the upset I feel when with others who might be aware of this conflict but do nothing. As Martin Luther King, Jr stated, *Our lives begin to end the moment we become silent about things that matter.*

Also motivating me: the need to practice compassionate listening and viewing, to open my heart to a variety of perspectives and experiences, to discover opinions and facts new to me, visit new areas, meet new people, and endlessly develop my skills to photograph in that unique Mediterranean light.

Three examples of discoveries: first, in Sderot, trauma is virtually universal among the entire population. Despite the relatively low number of casualties and the relatively high degree of security, one exploding rocket multiples fear. Second, in Gaza, most people do not trust being happy. Why? Because they suspect their happiness will be short-lived. Either Israel will attack again, or Hamas will go to battle with Fatah or other political factions, or the siege will never end, or the world will continue ignoring their suffering. Third, conditions of occupation are easing in the West Bank, meaning travel is freer, checkpoints less restrictive. But as Palestinians point out, Israel could tighten restrictions in a flash, and one danger of eased conditions is encouraging people to ignore the fact that they remain occupied, without a nation of their own. They are not free.



Across the street, this man and his family, brutally evicted from their home, live under a tent across from his former home, now lived in by extreme Jewish Israeli settlers

Thru my lens, I try to open my mouth—shout loud and clear—and hope others might notice and activate as they feel the call, if they feel the call. Many calls, choose one, get to work. Again as Martin said, *A man who hasn't found something he is willing to die for is not fit to live.* Harsh words from this dear gentle person of non-violence, but true. A prophet's words are often grating, exactly because they are true. They challenge us.



Raw sewage into the Mediterranean Sea, Gaza City, August 2009



Gaza City port—El Mina, August 2009



Jordan River entering the Sea of Galilee, September 2009

I'm home in Cambridge Massachusetts for one month, preparing new shows. On October 17 I depart for the southeast region of the United States, a 4-5 week tour with new perspectives, experiences, discoveries, questions (latest schedule here, when available: teeksaphoto.org/Pages/PublicPresentations.html). If you're anywhere between North Carolina and Florida, the East Coast and the Deep South and would like to organize a show, please contact David Matos at aiken_peace@yahoo.com, 803-215-3263 for information and to book. For the first two weeks of December I hope to be touring New England with a revised version of *Bethlehem the Holy*, in time for the Christmas season. I hope to see some of you on the road.



Skip Schiel, Gaza City, August 2009, photo by Banoosh Al Ghussain

One additional note: thanks to a benefactor and many encouraging people I'm embarking on transforming one of my Gaza shows into a video, not simply a conversion from slide show to video but an entire production based on a slide show. We hope to complete this project by September 2010. I'll let you know and may ask for your support.

As I finish this report I learned that the Obama administration apparently instructed its ambassador to the United Nations, Susan Rice, to block effective action of the report.

Goldstone Report of the United Nations Fact Finding Mission on the Gaza Conflict: www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrcouncil/specialsession/9/docs/UNFFMGC_Report.pdf

One rebuttal: www.ungoldstonereport.com



Golan Heights, September 2009



Sea of Galilee, September 2009



Banias River, a main tributary of the Jordan River, with off-duty Israeli soldiers, upper Galilee, September 2009