

When Will We Ever Learn?

by Louise Diamond, CEO, The Peace Company

When will humanity learn that violence always and only begets more violence? That force only creates escalating cycles of counterforce? That real peace never comes through the barrel of a gun, but only through the opening of the heart?

When will we learn that we cannot make allies out of enemies by refusing to speak together? That our actions carry the seeds of unintended consequences that can create more problems than the ones we think we are solving? That one human life is just as valuable as another?

Once again the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has erupted into flames. Once again the forces of destruction run amok, overshadowing all sanity, blithely setting in motion even graver long-term consequences, and threatening to grow and spread. Once again my heart breaks for the mothers grieving their dead or wounded loved ones, and for the thousands who have fled their homes in search of safety.

I think of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as the canary in the mine. It is our indicator of the viability of our global relationships. I began my professional peacebuilding career there in 1988, during the first *Intifada*, and have worked there on and off, following the situation closely, ever since. I've often thought, "If we can get it right in the Middle East, humanity can make it. If we don't get it right there, we're in big trouble."

My friends, we're in big trouble, and strange as it is to say, I have greater hope now than ever. Why? Because crisis mobilizes energy for change.

I believe people give up their suffering, and the patterns that perpetuate suffering, only under two conditions. One – if it hurts so bad they can't stand it anymore. Two – if they see a vision of a better way, and a pathway for attaining it. Ideally, when the two conditions occur together, the moment for change is ripe.

I think we are fast approaching the moment when it hurts so bad enough of us say, "Stop this madness! Stop it, now!" The combination of wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, renewed fighting in Gaza, and now Lebanon, with talk of involvement of Syria and Iran, and the continuous threat of terrorist activity, has gotten our attention at last. As a global community, it is time to begin an active search for a lasting peace, starting in the Middle East – the sacred (though shattered) heartland of the Abrahamic family.

At a political level, the elements required for that lasting peace are well known, and have been known for decades. What is missing is the political will to agree to them. By not being willing to accept less than their maximal positions, the leadership of both the Israelis (with enabling support from the United States), and the Palestinians (with enabling support from their Arab supporters) have doomed their people to ever-worsening cycles of violence. They all have much blood on their hands, and much to answer for, as the widening spiral of this conflict has reached around the world and infected many other situations with its poisonous touch.

At the spiritual level, the split between Christians, Moslems, and Jews is a festering karmic wound that has the potential to bring about destruction beyond our imagining if not addressed – and healed – quickly. The monotheistic understanding of One God that these three religions profess is mocked by their inability to live that truth in action.

At a personal level, those of us who love peace, and especially those of us who care deeply about the Middle East, find ourselves lamenting, demonstrating, holding vigils, demanding ceasefires, writing letters, convening dialogues, making donations for humanitarian relief, or sending delegations to decision-makers – all good actions, and yet the bombs and rockets continue to fall and we continue to feel helpless and dispirited. After all, we've been making these kinds of efforts for more years than we can count – and the brave Israeli and Palestinian peacemakers have given sweat, blood, and tears to the point of collapse. Yet still we must pursue whatever actions call us.

What else might we try? Here's a novel suggestion. Let's consider the acting out of aggression in the Middle East systemically. In systems theory we would say that each voice speaks for some part of the whole. In other words, the Middle East R Us.

The true causes of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and all its ramifications lie not in the historical or political realm, but in the realm of consciousness. Our beliefs and our words determine our actions, both individually and collectively. Quite simply what we believe is what we give our attention to, what we feed. And what we feed, grows. Thus the conscious and unconscious patterns of thought that we hold about ourselves and others create a web of action and reaction that we take for 'truth,' forgetting that it's all a co-creation from our view. When that view is destructive of life-force rather than enhancing of it, we can say it is like a poison.

The Israeli-Palestinian relationship is one of the places on this planet where the poisons of wrong view are being acted out so that all of us might look closely, realize what we are creating, and dedicate ourselves to a change. This change is one of consciousness first, followed by words and actions that will indeed build an entirely other way of being together on this one world we all call home. That way is the way of peace.

What then are the root poisons being displayed there, and how are we carrying those poisons in our own mind streams? I would say one key poison is the view that we are separate – one person, one group, from another. This leads to a mentality of win/lose and of domination, from a failure to understand that, because of our essential interdependence, our well-being depends on the well-being of others. This also leads to an arrogance born of a sense of superiority and entitlement – evident in the words and actions of both Hezbollah and Israel (and the U.S.). The actions that grow out of this arrogance feed ever-increasing degrees of trauma and pain, producing a hardening of the heart that denies love, healing, and reconciliation in favor of retaliation and revenge. With revenge in our hearts instead of love, we turn to force and its many manifestations, both subtle and overt, to solve human problems.

So another way to support peace in the Middle East is through our own inner work, to root out all sense of arrogance, superiority, entitlement, or separation from our own lives. To see where we have hardened our hearts against those who may have hurt us or with whom we disagree; to forgo

the luxury of rage and blame; to humble ourselves to make apologies and amends and to offer forgiveness and return to compassion and empathy.

So I believe we are called to action now on two levels. On the one hand, we must hold our national and global leaders accountable for human sanity and right relationship by every decent (and nonviolent) means available. On the other hand, we must not abrogate the responsibility that we ourselves carry subtly, for harboring the poisonous stream of ignorance, arrogance, and aggression in our own consciousness.

My friends, you who love peace, one of the dynamics of the recurring Middle East wars is that every time we think it can't get any worse, it does. We cannot afford, nor allow, this situation to continue to worsen. The level of destruction – physical, emotional, and spiritual – is already beyond comprehension. The way to peace requires inestimable courage, but the peace is the only way to go.

Once, while standing on the shore near Haifa, I had the thought that the Holy Land was at one time the heart chakra or energy center of the whole planet, but now that heart was shattered almost beyond repair. The remedy for a broken heart is love, love, and more love. Please join me in loving prayer and loving action to re-weave the tear in the human tapestry that is shredding the lives of our brothers and sisters in Lebanon, Gaza, Israel, Iraq, Iran, Syria, and elsewhere.

We began this discourse with the question: *When will we ever learn?* I hope and trust the answer to that question is, NOW! The conditions for a massive shift in human consciousness are present. It hurts so bad we are desperate for change, and we know what the better way – the way of peace – looks like. Please join me in making the peace path even more visible and inviting. Please join me in calling forth that seed of peace that resides in each and every one of us, our spiritual encoding or DNA. Our thoughts, our words, our deeds are creating the world we live in now and will inhabit tomorrow. May we grow only worlds of peace.