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## Empathy Is Essential to Humanity

Media Mention of Tala Haikal in The Huffington Post - July 10, 2014 - 12:00am  
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### Empathy Is Essential to Humanity

Nelson Mandela once said "you will achieve more in this world through acts of mercy than you will through acts of retribution." If only Mandela were still alive and could guide and inspire Israelis and Palestinians to eschew revenge and violence, especially when it comes to children.

Eyal Yifrah, Gilad Shaar and Naftali Fraenkel were three Israeli teenagers kidnapped and killed by Palestinian extremists in the occupied West Bank. The disappearance of the three teenagers triggered a manhunt that lasted for 17 days. Ultimately, the bodies of the boys were found in a field near Hebron, and it is evident they were killed shortly after being captured.

Mohamed Hussein Abu Khdeir, a sixteen year-old Palestinian teenager was abducted and killed by Jewish Israeli extremists. Mohamed's killing was an apparent "revenge attack." A recent autopsy reveals Mohamed was burnt [2] alive.

To make matters worse, Mohamed's cousin Tariq, a fifteen year old Palestinian-American, was brutally beaten and arrested by Israeli police and then put under house arrest. His case attracted widespread attention largely because he is an American citizen, although abusive treatment of Palestinian children by Israeli authorities is widespread and well documented.

These crimes are tragic but not unexpected. And they are horrifying. The price of the lack of peace in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is inevitably paid in human life, and increasingly the lives of children.

Of course, children are not the only victims in this non-ending violent conflict. Whole communities are being terrorized. Families in southern Israel are being targeted with a barrage of rockets. People in Gaza are being bombed and killed. Civilians bear the brunt of the suffering.

Historically, more Palestinian civilians have been killed than Israelis at every stage in the conflict. However, it does not matter which side you are on to recognize that children, above all, should not be harmed. There should be a special place in everybody's hearts for children.

The "normal" reactions to such deeds are anger, horror, violence, revenge, incitement etc. Many young Israelis will be asking what's wrong with the Palestinians just as many Palestinians question the humanity of Israel. In the recent days I have seen Facebook posts and tweets urging more destruction, violence, and killing. Some young Israelis and Palestinians are being radicalized by the loss of their friends, community members and school mates and are being devoured from fear and hatred.

However, I believe the most constructive approach to dealing with these types of tragedies is to show empathy for the other side and ask empathy from them. Empathy cannot be demanded without also being shown. It always must be a two-way street. I understand that its hard for Israelis and Palestinians to show empathy in this existential conflict. There are a number of reasons why people want to suppress empathy in order to brace themselves for pain and loss on the other side. Despite the reasons why human beings suppress their fellow feeling empathy is required to keep Israelis and Palestinians humane in the context of the conflict. If you lose your empathy you lose your humanity.

We Arab-Americans, Jewish-Americans, Palestinians, Arabs and Israelis need to work together to eliminate violence and seek empathy for ourselves and others. The families of Eyal, Gilad, Naftali, Mohamed deserve our public and private sympathy. We need to retain the higher moral ground no matter where we stand on the political spectrum.

As a young twenty-two year old Arab-American woman I would like to send my condolences to all these families. I cannot understand what it feels like losing a child. However, I ask those families not to seek vengeance for healing purposes. Instead, the proper response is to advocate for an end to the conflict so that no Israeli or Palestinian child will face the same fate of Eyal, Gilad, Naftali and Mohamed. The future of these teenagers has been taken away, but we should work together so that no other future of a child, whether Israeli or Palestinian, is stolen away.

As long as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict exists, tragedies like these are unavoidable. It is the lack of peace that produces such evil deeds. It is important not to forget that violence does not prevent violence. Only a negotiated peace between Israel and the Palestinians can eliminate this violence we have inherited from our parents.

It is for these reasons why we need two states for two people. Israelis deserve to live in a secure and peaceful state alongside a free and independent Palestinian state. If there is no solution to the conflict, violence will continue. Violence will continue to target the most vulnerable people on both sides. We have now been put on notice. We need to commit to peace. The time to act is now.

*Tala Haikal is the Youth Outreach Coordinator at the American Task Force on Palestine, and tweets @talamay*

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[2] <http://online.wsj.com/articles/arab-teenagers-autopsy-results-show-he-was-burned-to-death-palestinian-official-says-1404564160>