

THE SERVANT SONG

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Women Grieving Gaza and Palestine: Responding to Genocide from a Place of Privilege

by Suzanne Belote Shanley

Hosting a grieving circle at Agape persisted in my heart and soul after a conversation with Patricia Kirkpatrick, a young mother of three and daughter-in-law of Scott and Claire Schaeffer-Duffy, co-founders of Ss. Francis and Therese Catholic Worker in Worcester. Patricia and I found comfort in sharing our despair for the women and mothers of Gaza. Perhaps we three women might make sense of our collective helplessness and powerlessness with other women who felt similarly. Heart-sick and sometimes inarticulate over the slaughter in Gaza, we invited women friends to seek comfort in one another, to assuage our guilt, our pain.

On a cold February Sunday, about 25 women gathered at Agape creating in the circle's center, numerous vases of flowers, and the images of Palestinian women cradling their dead children. Suzanne began the sharing with a reading from Jewish martyr and writer, Etty Hillesum, who was killed at Auschwitz:

"What matters is not to allow my whole life to be dominated by what is going on inside me. ...One must not let oneself be completely disabled by just one thing, however bad; don't let it impede the great stream of life that flows through you."

That sense of being "dominated" and "disabled" by "one thing," Gaza, was the primary focus of coming together, to experience what shared sorrowing might mean. Agape's Francis House seemed a holy and sanctified container to hold our anguish.

Patricia quoted spiritual guide Joanna Macy, who observes that we are not "separate, isolated entities, but integral and organic parts of the vast web of life. ...neurons in a neural net, through which flow currents of awareness of what is happening to us as a species and as a planet." Macy and Hillesum seemed to be communicating through this "neural net" through each other to us in the circle.

Claire read the Seamus Heaney poem, "Mid-term Break," a meditation on the death of his four-year-old brother, which Claire compared to the news from Gaza, which "floods us with numbers of children dead, ... now over 10,000" making it "difficult to take in what each child's death

means." For a family, and how only one such death can shake the core of community."

- After a sustained silence, scores of glowing candles creating a sense of stillness, we listened to each other. We heard these words of mourning which covered us in sorrow.

- How can a child be in such conditions? I do not want my own children to see me weep, and yet, weeping is what I am feeling.

- I recently saw a photo of a deceased child of a client, and it had a profound effect on me. I wanted to hold that child.

- I remember my own child in the hospital, unable to breathe...given a second chance because of the medical procedures the people of Gaza do not have.

- Women's grief is passed down from generation to generation and women have been told that it is "unsafe" to weep. Yet, we must weep and wail and release a mystical force.

- The youngest woman in our group, age 24, expressed her gratitude for the older women standing somewhere. She identified with the dead child in the Gaza icon, feeling "more like the baby, powerless."

- Guilt at her warm bed, nutritious meals, compelled another to ask: "Why do I get to have everything I need, and they have nothing?" She added that my "joyful life" with "grandchildren, while the children of Gaza have nothing, nothing" left her feeling complicit. Yet our circle was sending out "filaments of love to the women in Gaza and their children."

- One griever spoke of the "feminine psychic wound we carry."

- With a riveting retelling, another member spoke of "a young girl pulled out of the rubble from a recent bombing. ... whose body was carried over one man's shoulder, while another tried "to cover her body." It seemed that this was a "struggle of whether to cover up the result of the unconscionable bombing. ...showing respect for the ...desecrated body," while "enraged" others may have wanted to

show "how children were the victims of this unimaginable, indiscriminate bombing. We need to keep crying out to expose evil and be present with those who are its victims."

- Another remark focused on "our human capacity for brutality." "How does God believe in us?" The images "hardest to bear are those of the children lining up at the soup kitchens, each with one pot to receive on scoop of soup, which the child is then entrusted to bring back to his or her family."

- "Old animosities" and "old mistakes repeated" released in another mourner, her "anger and disappointment in the human race," while observing that "The ability to think beyond violence is diminished due to the trauma that the cultures have suffered."

- Another: "I believe deeply in a God of Love, a Love that is with us always. ... I want a God that will also end the violence and suffering NOW. ...what have visioned is our God weeping in the dust inconsolable. ...a God who suffers with us and that I too am called to be with those that are suffering. ...I must trust that this is a way to push against the darkness."

- "Grief spilled from broken hearts. ...vulnerability that tested our limitations of expression. ... Why is it that the lid on emotion is so tight and my tears only hug the corners of my eyes and do not flow freely. Why do words stay stuck in my throat, choking me with their incoherency, or fear of judgment?"

- "Soul-enriching" wrote another "grieving the suffering, the forever-wars, Millenia of such moments." The Buddhist Goddess of compassion Kuan Yin has many arms and "acts decisively and with purpose to relieve suffering" with "wise and heartfelt action."

- One mother of a toddler "stomping on frozen puddles to smash through the ice," comments that she has a "rotten swell of thoughts," about parents dropping their kids off to school: "Why aren't these parents screaming?" Feeling sometimes like there is

"Nowhere to turn," this woman called us to consider "tax resistance" and echoing another voice in the circle, to "maintain our endurance."

- We heard about Palestinian, Hirsham Awartani, out celebrating his birthday with two friends in Burlington, Vt. when all three were fired upon and injured. Hirsham was struck in the spine and paralyzed from his chest down. He observed that on the West Bank where he grew up "the medical services which saved my life here would likely have been withheld by the Israeli Army. The soldier who would've shot me would go home and never be convicted." He saw himself as but one casualty in a wider conflict. A poem that he wrote as a sixth grader at the Ramallah Friends School relates to how Pandora opened a box and all the evil escaped, only Hope remained. The last words were: "Learn to never give up Hope Learn to let Hope give power / in the darkest of times and let the Light shine."

The circle closing came with sharing of a feeling of numbness and non-response, which matched feelings of guilt and puzzlement over difficult moments in family events if Gaza is mentioned.

At one significant juncture, Molly Scott led us in a keening experience of the raw guttural power of sound, emanating from her deepest core, taking us to a place of moaning, rocking, sobbing, body wracking tears...then silence.

As 25 women who came together in a circle of grief, we have since all reconnected. From compassion to action, in pursuit of the nonviolent lineage which I invoked at the conclusion of the gathering. I sang out the names, in the gospel lineage of our Christian peace matriarchy: Dorothy Day, Eileen Egan, Lucretia Mott, and on.

Patricia is organizing a local meeting around tax resistance. Molly Scott has invited people to a June keening event. Claire continues her work at the Center for Nonviolent Solutions, Pat Ferrone with Pax Christi, and each of us in our own beating "neuron".

Humanity's One Last Chance?

by Brayton Shanley

In January 2017, some of us Agape folk ventured to Washington DC to take part in the Donald Trump, anti-inaugural witness and to join the Women's March the next day. While at the inaugural protest, with 200 or so activists, I remarked to one under-thirty, fellow dissident: "I have never seen it look worse." This next-generation protestor stared back in disbelief as I proceeded to describe my reasoning. I could almost hear him saying to himself: "Oh my, never been worse?"

As the apocalyptic mood has increased in 2024, I turned to the book, *Albert Camus, and the Human Crisis*, by Robert Emmet Meagher. In the war-devastated world of 1946, Camus wrote: "All around us in the postwar world violence has a stranglehold on us. Inside every nation. ...mistrust, resentment, greed, and the race for power are manufacturing a dark, desperate universe. Perhaps you who live in the still happy America do not see this."

Like a true pacifist without proclaiming his pacifism, Camus considered all killing murder. Living through WWII and the post-war years, the Holocaust, the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the ensuing arms race between the US and the Soviet Union, Camus held the legal and efficient Death Penalty in particular dread.

Camus faced a post-war world where "Hitler was dead," but despite this fact, Camus warned: "We know perfectly well that the venom is not gone that each of us carry in our own hearts." Suffering from the moral and existential pain of the times, Camus conjectured: "Humanity has probably been given its last chance."

And here we stand in 2024, 78 years later as the same question haunts our present extremities. The wars in the Holy Land and Ukraine illustrate this same venom lurking inside every nation. The question looms larger than in 1946. Will we as a human species finally have the courage of the truth to turn from violence to peace?

The War in Ukraine

For over two years, the Russian army has been pulverizing Ukraine by leveling the buildings and cultural centers in over 10 Ukraine cities. The people of Ukraine bravely fight back, but, are presently struggling to hold the battle line steady. Common wisdom is that Ukraine cannot win but can only stall the Russian army, but, as a result, begin to lose.

This war is seen by most of the world as the underdog David fighting back the evil giant Goliath, the innocent, vulnerable little "guy" pushing back inevitable defeat by holding ground against the 3rd largest military in the world. A "valiant" and "heroic" Zelensky stands up to an evil oppressor-invasion, Vladimir Putin.

Two deeper truths emerge in this war that dismantle the myth of the innocence of David. Again, do we have the courage to ask: "Who is the true enemy here?"

Stephen Kotkin, Russian historian at Stanford University said in an interview with David Remnick: "Russians have been under authoritarian government for two hundred years, culminating with Josef Stalin where killing and fear were employed as a way to hold and command power." Putin, in that Russian tradition, is relying on mass killing and the power of a first world military as the best option in conflict between nations that oppose him. To back it up, he has the largest nuclear arsenal in the world.

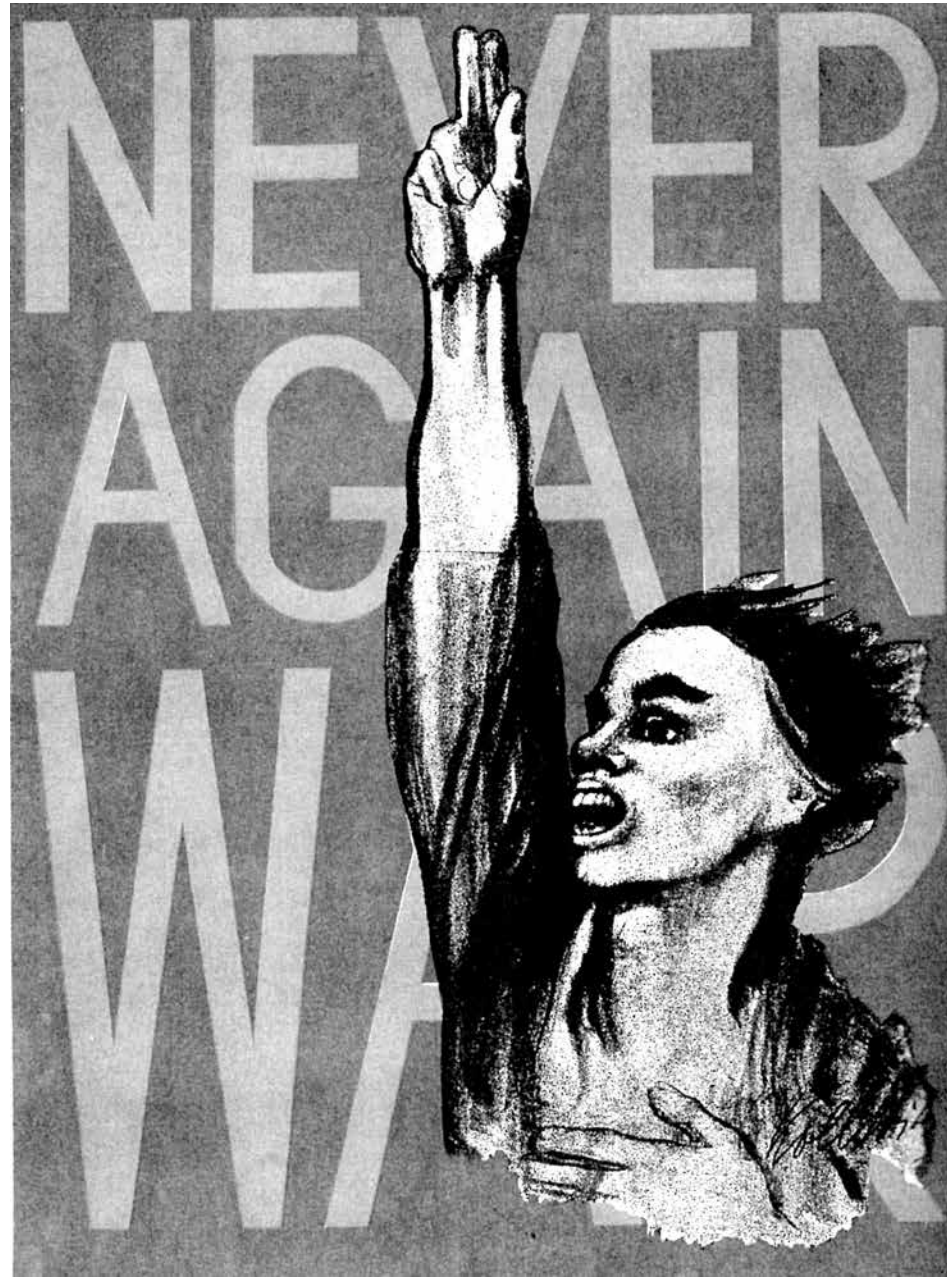
Volodymyr Zelensky and his Ukraine nation have developed an army impressive enough to go toe-to-toe with a vastly superior Russian army. Zelensky and a seemingly vast majority of the Ukrainian people believe in war and weapons of war to ensure justice and finally bring peace by outgunning the "invaders." The Ukrainian people, against overwhelming odds, side with their military's counter-violence to maintain their autonomy as a nation. Might not only makes right but it "protects right."

Most people in both countries support violence and war as the most effective solution to maintain their freedom, with war as

the ultimate protection. Both countries have armies that will fight to the death, securing their primary identities as Russians and Ukrainians first. They will die for the freedom of their people and countries. The body politic in both countries support their armies and leaders, as they struggle to fight, push back, and kill the enemy nation in the name of Russia and Ukraine.

Hamas, is taken from an acronym, HMS, which in Arabic means "Islamic Resistance Movement." Most Palestinians believe that Hamas is the most effective party at inflicting pain on the Israelis through violence and war. As a result, many support Hamas' war with Israel and the October 7th attacks as a necessary challenge to Israel's power over them.

In these long 76 years, Palestinians



© Kathe Kollwitz

Hamas Vs. Israel—Unstoppable Carnage?

Having shot their way into the Holy Land, Israel occupied Palestine in 1948. They had the solid backing of Britain, the US, and the United Nations. All these principal countries who supported a Zionist occupation are countries that have used war very effectively to gain power and influence in the world.

The just and righteous idea of a safe-haven for Jews in Palestine required the violence, killing and subjugation of Palestinians. "Might," or violence and war, "protects right" yet again. After 76 years of Israeli killing and oppressing Palestinians, Hamas levels a devastating revenge on October 7, 2024. 1200 Israelis are murdered and 250 people, primarily Israelis, are taken hostage. In response, Israel's ground war in Gaza has, up to this point, killed 31,000 Palestinian, 13,000 children and 8,600 women, with 70,300 wounded, 1.9 million displaced and thousands presumed dead under the rubble while widespread famine looms with catastrophic levels of hunger.

This deadly pattern in conflict between nations continues unabated. Israeli citizens continue to advocate and participate in this war of mass slaughter of humans as the most effective way to settle differences and maintain dominance. Netanyahu wants to kill every Hamas fighter, believing the way to eliminate the political problem is to eliminate the enemy. His government, by and large, and the Israel people, are true believers when it comes to killing Hamas fighters.

Hamas came into being in 1987 as a violent resistance to Israel proclaiming that "Israel has no right to exist." The name,

have been killed, driven off their land, imprisoned in Israeli jails, stripped of their freedom of movement in Gaza and the West Bank. This torturous existence is inflicted on them by Israel.

We, the world community, must have compassion and an abundance of sympathy for how these people, enraged at such horrifying injustices and desperate for relief, would turn to violence as a way of pushing back on Israel's dominance over them. Nonetheless, the violence of Hamas has not served the Palestinians any advantage. Instead, the fixed pattern holds—humans in conflict are quick to rely on violence for survival and to exact "justice." War wins again.

Leo Tolstoy cuts to the core of this propensity of humans to wage war. "Government is violence." What government doesn't possess weapons to protect their people? What country came into existence without violence and believes that it must protect its future with violence? What body politic, in any country, doesn't look to its government and leaders for protection through a strong military defense?

Looking at the countries where war is raging, Russia, Ukraine, Hamas, and the NATO countries that support Israel and Ukraine, all of them possess deep histories of relying on weapons of war for protection and political advantage. The Lead nation, the US, pours billions of dollars and major weapons' systems into the Ukraine was effort without which they would not have lasted a week against the Russians. The long-standing support of Israel by the US tells a particularly tragic story which supports the idea that "Israel has the right to defend itself." Therefore, we are getting ready to fund 10 billion dollars into

the war crime we call the ground war in Gaza. With our power and influence and Israel's reliance on our financial support, we wield a singular political power.

The US remains the only country on earth that could insist on a ceasefire agreement from Israel, and we don't. Yet, the daily slaughter of children and their mothers continues. Don't these facts add to one conclusion? The people of every country who support the war in Gaza and Ukraine have blood on their hands. Every country in this world that relies on war, perpetuates war, renders the next massacre of people and their children inevitable, creates a lifetime of trauma in those who survive.

A Palestinian Prophecy of Women

Huda Habuargoob, a Palestinian and Yael Moan, an Israeli, members of Women Wage Peace, took part in a recent discussion about the devastation resulting from the war in Gaza. Huda's first-hand experience of the Gazan war has brought her to a seminal truth: "The warlike take over and lose their humanity when only the people can bring peace. This war continues because of politics and the power-mongers are the problem. The Women's Movement in Palestine could not advocate for one Palestinian prisoner held in Israel. Women are not sitting around the table. If women were sitting around the table, the dynamics would change."

When considering those who are "war-like" and those who are "power mongers" it would be extremely rare that one would point to a female image. Political, economic, and military power has been throughout history, the domain of men.

Men identify with power and the protectors of "the tribe." They are the first to volunteer to "fight." Men in political conflict too often engage in language that escalates disagreement when in a dispute with other men. They typically design and build weapons of war, declare war, and deploy male soldiers to fight against other men in enemy countries. Men kill and injure enemy soldiers and noncombatants, including women and children.

It isn't as if women are absent in the entire process of governance and the military; but it remains a fact of gender that men commit the most heinous acts of violence. 93% of all homicides are male-perpetrated and this figure undoubtedly goes up in war. Mass shooters are 95% male, and the same male dominance holds true for torture and rape. Men in power, acting without women and the influence of the feminine impulse within them, risk a strong, almost inevitable, proclivity for violence. Huda Abuar-goob's certainty offers a dire urgency. With women as equal partners with men, sitting around the table of political, economic, and spiritual decision-making, violence would not be inevitable. The ethics of care provides a feminine contribution which encompasses a mother's concern for children, especially those children unprotected from violence and war.

The image of this integrity is powerfully seen in The Taoist Traditions of Yin Yang unity. The yin of the feminine and the yang of the masculine are in balance within the circle. In this process, the feminine influence pacifies the overly masculinized, truncated, fear-driven, well-trod path to war. Mahatma Gandhi taught a valuable lesson to men of the world when he stated: "Growth in nonviolence is growth in the feminine."

The Nonviolent Jesus: A Way Out of No Way

It needs to be clear to the human family living in 2024, that war is simply a "kill-or-be-killed" madness where no side wins. Impressive nuclear weapons arsenals exist in Israel, the US and Russia. Putin has now delivered a threat to use nuclear bombs if the US deploys ground troops in Ukraine. Once again, all principal players in this end-of-the-world scenario are men.

It is time we disarm these weapons while we still have the time. Especially for us men, can we begin to disarm all our

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Gaza and Dual Loyalty

by Skip Schiel

I devoted a week-long retreat at Agape in frigid snowless February 2024 while the war on Gaza exploded after Hamas attacked Israel on October 7, 2023, and Israel invaded Gaza on October 17. I waded into Agape's rich prayer life and every day strolled joyfully to the nearby Quabbin Woods, twice to the sacred waters of Quabbin Reservoir.

What follows is drawn from my 4-part blog, "Dual Loyalty," based on my personal connections with people in Palestine-Israel, and using my archive of 20 years of photography, movies, and writing about the violence over Gaza and Hamas.

The Palestinian inner layers of psychology go around one single issue: the 1948 uprooting and the destruction of their homes. Israelis are making the Palestinians relive this trauma, which is deeply buried into our conscious and our unconscious.

—Ayad El Sarraj (long a Gaza resident, psychiatrist, founder of the Gaza Community Mental Health Program, and activist, died in 2013.)

On October 7, 2023, I lunched with a close Jewish friend at the Burren Irish restaurant in Somerville as joyous Irish music played. Earlier that morning, we learned that Hamas, a Palestinian resistance organization centered in Gaza (said by many to be a terrorist organization), had massacred some 1,200 human beings, mostly civilian, living in Israeli communities bordering Gaza. (Along with some military and security officers and agriculture workers from other countries.) Since that lunch, at my friend's request, we have rarely discussed the unfolding events which trouble both of us deeply. "Enough," she says to me, needing to be silent, at least with me, about what I need to discuss.

As the terror over Gaza unfolded, I thought about my photographs, movies, and writing about Gaza, the Israeli border communities, and the West Bank. Heart and gut-sick, riven by nightmares and the news, I began assembling a series of blogs about Gaza, Kissufim and the West Bank, drawing on my personal connections and archive.

The following profile of my four friends creates specific personal stories which express realities beyond traditional news. I am determined to share my horror and grief over the war and my love of Gaza.

In Gaza

After I learned that the American Friends Service Committee ran programs there, I have volunteered as a photographer and teacher of photography in Gaza. In 2004, after several earlier failed attempts, I finally entered Gaza for the first time—hesitantly. I worried about being killed, injured, or abducted. I emailed my cyber support team to ask for their guidance. One suggested: sit with this opportunity awhile. After your worry decreases and you can think more clearly, you'll make the correct decision.

Ibrahim Shatali, who eventually became a close friend (is he alive?), arranged hospitality for me with three young Palestinian men. We slept shoulder to shoulder on the floor in their small, dirty, messy flat, unwashed dishes piled high in the sink. All were college students with meager means, yet they treated me to some of the best shurwma I've ever eaten. I heard Israeli bombardment daily and learned one morning that the Israeli army had invaded the southern portion of the Strip about 10 miles from our location in Gaza City. During my morning walks I heard the incessant buzz of Israeli surveillance drones overhead. I worried that I might be attacked.

Meeting some Gaza Community Mental Health Program staff through the AFSC, I rode with psychiatrists examining children shot by Israel snipers. I photographed a boy about 10 years old shot in the stomach as he rode his bike with friends, and a girl about 12, her wrist shattered by a 50 mm tank shell as she played with friends on the roof of her



Palestinian Boy Shot by Sniper © Skip Schiel



Unexploded Ordinance in Gaza © Skip Schiel

home. While I photographed, tears surged behind my eyes, which felt as if they would fly from my head. I couldn't weep while I photographed, so when I returned to our taxi, tears flooded.

Call Out Their Names: *Wesam Amer - Ibrahim Shatali - Amal Sabawi - Ban Al Ghussain - Islam Madhoun - Firas Ramlawi - Marwan Diab - Reem Abu Jaber - Hesham Mnana - Mona El Farra - Mosab Nour Abu Daqqa*

Are you alive? Where are you? How are you and your families surviving? Can you find food, water, and protection? Using Facebook and other social media I probe these questions.

Wesam Amer who I met in 2022 in my home city, Cambridge, while he was a Harvard Fulbright researcher in social media, posts on Facebook frequently. In October, I was able to reach him by phone. He told me that his entire neighborhood in Khan Younis was under attack. Three families from the north were sheltering in his small flat. He tried and failed to leave Gaza thru the Rafah Crossing into Egypt six times.

Because he has a German passport from his earlier PhD studies, he and his family were finally able to leave Gaza in November and are now in Germany in tough but improved conditions. And Ban, a former photography student whom I inadvertently helped meet her lifelong mate, Islam, recently reposted a video of Gaza before the destruction, a Mecca of Beauty along the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. So, in February at least she was still alive.

The dead, the dead, the dead—our dead—or South or North, ours all, (all, all, finally dear to me). (Walt Whitman on the American Civil War).

In Israel

Before the Hamas attack on October 7, 2023, I had visited some of the now devastated communities, including the small city of Sderot, less than one half mile from northern Gaza, and kibbutzim (cooperative agricultural communities) like Kissufim also within one half mile of southern Gaza.

In 2018 I stayed with families while I made a movie about Other Voice, an Israeli organization that advocates diplomacy, compromise, and negotiations rather than war. In earlier years I had visited Sderot, resided overnight several times, and photographed and interviewed residents. I wished to experience the fears they described living so close to Gaza. Later I learned that Sderot, Kissufim and other border communities, (called by some, settlements, or colonies) are built on lands previously inhabited by Palestinians.

Call out their names: *Nomika Zion - Yeela Raanan - Eric Yellin - Roni Keidar - Micha Ben Hillel* *Were you injured? Was your home destroyed? Have you survived? What did you witness? Where are you now? When will you be able to return home?*

Yeela Raanan writes regularly through her Facebook page. I've learned about her condition since October 7, what happened on that day to her and her kibbutz, Kissufim. For an update and with follow up questions I wrote to her directly. She explained:

Shani and I (my 12-year-old daughter) ran to the safe room when the attack started, and an hour later, because the door handle broke, we had to escape this room, and ran into the second safe room we have in the house (it is an old house, and it was renovated from two very small living units, each came with its own safe room.) The Hamas came into our home, but after seeing that the safe room was empty did not search for a

second safe room.... so, we had what i call "the second safe room miracle...."

As Hamas ransacked the house, my daughter and i hugged and whispered to each other, hoping not to be killed. After a while they left and did not return to our home. We stayed under fire in the safe room for 24 hours, 20 of those hours without electricity or any communication. Eventually at 6:30am we were rescued under fire by the Israeli military, and taken out of the kibbutz, to a bus, which took us to the dead sea hotels.

Dual Loyalty

Call out her name: *Sahar Vardi:*

I worked with Sahar, a brave Jewish Israeli peace and justice advocate, formerly employed by the AFSC when it documented U.S. companies based in Israeli settlements. I accessed her blog (republished in The Times of Israel) about Dual Loyalty—empathy AND COMPASSION FOR all the suffering parties, Jewish, Palestinian, in Gaza, the West Bank, and Israel.

A war resister, Sahar has been imprisoned multiple times, arrested while protesting (I've been with her during an arrest, photographing her). She speaks eloquently through her multiple channels, and wrote me recently that contrary to expectation, she'd not been attacked by Israelis but supported by some.

Immersed in the widespread support in Israel against Gaza, she struggles to speak out and support Palestinian farmers harassed by settlers. For instance, a group of some 100 Israeli doctors published in Israeli media: "Attacking terrorist headquarters [mainly hospitals] is the right and the duty of the Israeli army." This view, seconded by some Israeli officials and some leading rabbis, makes Sahar a rare Israeli. She is aware of the potential collapse of Israeli morality. And because the world watches without determined action to stop the carnage—in full view—international morality may be collapsing as well.

It's that moment when you talk to a friend who doesn't know whether their relatives are dead or kidnapped and what they should even hope for, that you see the helplessness, the fear, the deep pain. And a moment later, it's talking to a friend from Gaza who can only say that every night is now the scariest night of his life; that he calculates his chances, and those of his daughters, of waking up alive the next morning.

"Dual loyalty" is feeling the heart-break of this and of that.

— Sahar Vardi

Call out my name: *The Other Skip*

Inspired by Naomi Klein's recent book, *Doppelganger*, I feel my double lives in Gaza. My double is a child wandering the streets of Gaza, my family, mother, father, brothers and sisters, my extended family, all dead.

My double has been abducted by Hamas and now barely survives in the tunnels. My double also lives miles from my home in kibbutz Kissufim, displaced to some hotel along the Dead Sea at the government's expense but without my usual quotidian life-affirming materials, my favorite skillet, my books, my walking, and biking routes. My double is unsure when I'll be able to return home, rebuild it, and mourn the deaths of neighbors. My double has no idea whether Gaza will continue to exist.

The Other Skip—an incubus forces his way into my sleep, exacerbates my chronic insomnia—wonders when The Other Skip will be able to resume his normal life. All my doubles wonder whether they will survive, ever again be home, safe, secure, and living with dignity and justice.

Freedom, equality and security, peace, and justice for all residing between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea. (Blog <https://skipschiel.wordpress.com/2023/11/24/dual-loyalty-part-1/>)



What Do Women Do?

We see, we weep, we cry, we hold,
 We rock, we scream, we rage, we comfort.
 We nourish, we offer others rest, we tuck them in, we
 put them to bed,
 We cook, we feed, we visit,
 We sing, we moan, we sigh,
 We nurse, we bind wounds, we share bread,
 We wash, we clean, we teach, we learn,
 We fetch, we carry, we walk,
 We plant, we tend, we grow, we reap,
 We gather into circles, we share, we talk, we pray,
 We suckle, we wean, we conceive, we give birth, we
 create.
 We build the fire and bake the bread,
 We love, we live, we believe,
 We write, we advocate, we ask for help, we work,
 And somehow it heals.
 Is it enough?
 Is it enough?
 Is it enough?
 We rest, we fall, we rise,
 We begin again,
 Always.

by Kathleen Legg

Kathleen Legg has been a member of Agape's extended community, with her husband, David. The poem was inspired by the women's grieving circle.

Pontius Pilate Was Just a Roman Joe Biden

by Emmanuel Charles McCarthy

Since the late 1960s, it has been a continuous refrain in Catholic and most mainline Christian Churches that "Jews didn't kill Jesus, the Romans did." The rationale advanced to support this statement is that crucifixion is a Roman form of capital punishment. Jews in Jerusalem did not and could not use crucifixion to kill enemies. Therefore, since Jesus died by crucifixion, He was killed by the Romans for being a threat to the Roman government in Jerusalem in some fashion.

I never found this presentation of Jesus' murder a convincing nor a rationally acceptable interpretation of the Gospels' text because there are so many passages in the Gospels that undermine it. That blindly obedient Roman soldiers, not all Romans, with Pilate's reluctant approval killed Jesus by crucifixion is incontestably documented. What is also incontestably documented is that many Jewish religious leaders were explicitly seeking for a way to kill Jesus for two to three years before His crucifixion. Their intimidation of Pilate is what brought Pilate to order Jesus' execution, even after he personally and publicly said, "I find no guilt in this man" (Lk 23:4, 23:22; Mt 27:23; Mk15:14; Jn 18:38, 19:4, 19:6). This intimidation is the documented cause, without which there would not have been a crucifixion.

Today, President Biden is called "Genocide Joe" and this session of Congress is called the "Genocide Congress" or the "AIPAC Congress," because of the absolute military and monetary support of both for Israel's murderous ethnic cleansing of Palestinian men, women and children in Gaza. Biden and the US Congress,



like Pilate, are just intimidated and cowardly political apparatchiks looking out for their own survival and self-interest. Threaten their status or standard of living as some Jews did 2000 years ago with Pilate, and as many Jews today are doing with Pres-



ident Biden and the members of Congress, and they will do anything to save the "good life" they have.

Doing anything includes supporting the murder of the Innocent One twenty centuries ago and supporting the murder of tens of thou-

sands of innocent ones in the last four and a half months in Gaza with a superabundance of assistance from Joe Biden and the members of the U.S. Congress, without which there could not have been such a genocidal orgy of murderous devastation.

Acquiring and ruling Gaza by savage violence may make a few or many Jewish people a great deal of money because of what the land holds beneath its surface. But as sure as Yahweh exists, neither *Shalom* nor the *Shekhinah* will ever abide there. Gaza, like Auschwitz, will forever be for humanity an "ich-abod" space in time because of the unalloyed idolatry, infidelity, mercilessness and evil that large numbers of the Chosen People have brought to earth there.

Joe Biden is the American Pontius Pilate, or perhaps, Pontius Pilate is the Roman Joe Biden. In either case the pusillanimous Pontius Pilate had Jesus tortured and put to death out of fear of some Jews and the pusillanimous Joe Biden and the equally craven members of the U.S. Congress have had Jesus tortured and put to death tens of thousands of times over, "Whatever you do to the least you do to me," out fear of some Jews.

To the extent that Joe Biden and the members of U.S. Congress are Christian, it must be asked by sane people, "What in hell church do they attend?" "Who in hell are its leaders?" "Who in hell is their god?"

Audio/video materials on Gospel Nonviolence are available at Emmanuel Charles McCarthy, you tube, his written materials at www.emmanuelcharlesmccarthy.org, his books and booklet at raroian@charter.net. Everything is available free of charge. Charlie is Agape's co-founder.

Interfaith Ceasefire Vigil with Mass Peace Action: Boston, MA

by Dotty Gadosh

"We are witnessing Genocide in Gaza right now" as Aaron Bushnell said before he took his own life by self-immolation at the Israeli Consulate in Washington DC. Members of Mass Peace Action, (MAPA) feeling enormous grief and rage over his death and the murder of over 31,000 children, women, and men in Gaza by the Israeli government, organized an Interfaith Vigil in Boston on Saturday, March 9, 2024.

Aaron's words challenged us: "Many of us like to ask ourselves, 'what would I do if I was alive during slavery? Or the Holocaust in Germany...if my country was committing genocide?' The answer is, you're doing it Right Now." We know in our names and with our tax dollars--the governments in Israel and the USA, are actively committing genocide against the innocent in Gaza. Members of different faith organized the remembrance to share our grief, fear, rage, together in community, and to honor the memory of the blessed souls who have died so needlessly, and to re-inspire us to take action to STOP the bloodshed.

We wanted to challenge publicly, the prevailing narrative that seeks to minimize Aaron's supreme act of protest and sacrifice by arguing that Aaron committed "suicide" not because of principle, or out of love for the people of Gaza. His statements before his self-immolation make it clear his motivation was to stop the slaughter of Gazans as he shouted "Free Palestine" be-

fore crumbling to the ground.

We learned from speakers such as John Bach of Friends Meeting in Cambridge, that Aaron followed in a courageous tradition of people who through self-immolation, peacefully sacrifice themselves to save others and to stop unjust wars- like Vietnamese monks as well as US citizens, Roger LaPorte, and Norman Morrison, during the brutal US War against the People of Viet Nam in the 1960's.

We welcomed people from many faith traditions: Key facilitator, Layal Cable -a Palestinian teacher living in the US and veteran of years of activism for her people. In addition, Hani Murad, a Palestinian who worked in GAZA for 20 years as a UN psychologist, as well as Dr. Karamah Kuemmerle, a Muslim Doctors Against Genocide; Jess Feldman, of Jewish Voices for Peace; Brayton Shanley, Catholic, Agape Community; John Bach Friends Meeting, Cambridge, Quaker; Jean-Luc Pierite, North American Indian Center, Boston, Indigenous; Doug Stuart and Joe Kebartas, Veterans for Peace and Clare Carter, New England Peace Pagoda, Buddhist.

As one of the organizers, I found that the experience moving and inspiring, especially seeing the enthusiasm with which



Boston Vigil

busy people we asked to speak greeted our request with such short notice. Several presenters thanked us for including them in this "sacred" remembrance ceremony.

The turn-out was beyond expectations with well over 100 people joining us. Candles, flowers, a CEASEFIRE NOW banner, and images of Aaron, of Gaza's suffering children, and of Rachel Corrie (run over by an Israeli tank while attempting to prevent demolition of a Palestinian home) greeted the participants. We distributed candles to the participants.

The event was intended as a quiet vigil, not a "rally" or "stand-out" to allow

for reflection/ introspection and a mood of reverence. Although the gathering was quiet except for the speakers, our facilitator, Layla and organizer Amna Saeed-Kothe, exhorted us, in final comments, to ACTION: Keep "showing up" for the people of Gaza wherever and however we can: on the streets of Boston and other towns, in the offices of our political "leaders", through promoting (Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions), through social media posts and images, in our newspapers, through "Letters to the Editor", by speaking to our friends, family and neighbors.

The situation is more and more desperate for Palestinians, especially as Israel prepares a brutal assault on Rafah. May we be strengthened and inspired by the courage demonstrated by Aaron Bushnell and by so many Palestinians who refuse to stay silent in the face of the horrors witnessed daily in Gaza. May we also gain resolve through coming together in community, to mourn, rage, and organize to STOP THIS GENOCIDE!

(For comments or questions, contact: Dorothy Gaydosh weareone49@gmail.com)

From the Works of War to Environmental Justice

By Jim Robinson

We face a rapidly expanding eco-social crisis that threatens the very foundations of life on earth. At the center of this crisis is the horror of war. A warring world can never be sustainable. Code Pink has distilled this realization—which is both obvious and frequently ignored—into the phrase “War is not Green.” While all living and growing beings reach ceaselessly into the future, the catastrophe of warfare only “erases the future,” as Pope Francis has poignantly and pointedly put it. So, where do we turn in this time of war, and during what Cornel West calls a “climate catastrophe”? We know we need conversion (“to turn around,” literally). With this in mind, we might ask ourselves: what must we stand against, and what must we turn toward?

What Must We Stand Against?

In “Feminism and Peace” (1983), Rosemary Radford Ruether asserts that “warmaking has reached such a level of destructiveness that the defeat of one side means the defeat of all, the destruction of the earth itself.” She insists that if we are to “end the violence that threatens all humanity and the planet itself,” we must seek the “ultimate renunciation of war altogether.” In *Gaia & God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth-Healing* (1992), Ruether argues that “militarism must be seen as the ultimate polluter of the earth.”

If we are to inhabit this planet justly and sustainably, we must abandon the ways of war as well as the causes and conditions of war. We must resist and denounce celebrations of war, sacralization of war, justifications of war, and investments in war, firmly and finally. We must stand against the normalization of militarism, the ubiquity of weaponry, the invasion of violence into the rhythms of our daily lives.

The God of Peace calls us to unlearn war, to turn our swords and spears, rockets, and bombs, into tools for tending the soil. Our God calls us to disarm our hearts while working for military disarmament. As we resist militarism globally, we must more specifically turn our attention to the atrocities in Gaza.

On October 29, 2023, Pope Francis made a clear call for a ceasefire in Gaza, emphasizing that “war is always a defeat—always, always!” On November 5 and December 13, 2023, he reiterated this plea for immediate ceasefire.

On January 29, 2024, Francis declared, “I will never tire of reiterating my call, addressed in particular to those who have political responsibility: stop the bombs and missiles now.” Catholics, Christians, and all people of goodwill are called to collectively denounce the horror of this violence, which has taken the lives of over 31,000 people in Gaza, which has displaced over a million people, which has devastated the soil, water, and air. We must join our voices in demanding an end.



What Must We Turn Toward?

In an iconic and illuminating piece of Catholic Worker art, Rita Corbin contrasts the “Works of Mercy,” which constitute the heart of the actual practice of Christianity, with the “Works of War.” Jesus calls his disciples to practice the Works of Mercy, to “feed the hungry, clothe the naked, give drink to the thirsty,” to “visit the imprisoned, care for the sick, and bury the dead.” The Works of War involve us in the demonic opposite. “The Works of War” for Corbin: “destroy crops and land, seize food supplies, destroy homes, scatter families, contaminate water, imprison dissenters, inflict wounds [and] burns,” and “kill the living.” This is a picture of Gaza in the present moment.

The ceaseless invitation issued by Jesus and the prophets of peace is to turn from the Works of War toward the Works of Mercy. As we make this turn, personally and collectively, we must simultaneously work for deep and sustainable justice. Our “No!” to ideologies and systems of violence, our work to resist these systems, must coincide with the constructive work of envisioning and enflashing a future marked by mutual flourishing.

Zeinab Shuker compellingly argues that calls for authentic and sustainable peace in Gaza must coincide with the promotion of environmental justice. The necessary shift from warfare to ceasefire, “will merely mark the end of one chapter of Gaza’s suffering.” Shuker characterizes the vast devastation of Palestine as an “environmental nakba” and “nothing less than an ecocide.”

During the month of October 2023, with water and sewage treatment facilities thoroughly damaged or incapable of operating, more than 130,000 cubic meters of untreated sewage has been released into the Mediterranean Sea. Meanwhile, displaced families have been “forced to bathe, drink, and wash their clothes in the polluted water.” In October alone, more than 25,000 metric tons of bombs rained down on Gaza, destroying lives, tearing families apart, reducing buildings to rubble, and bringing the earth itself to ruin.

Ramesh Rajasingham, Director of Coordination at the U.N.’s Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, recently warned the world that at least 576,000 people in Gaza are now “one step away from famine.” Bernie Sanders reminds us that “What is happening in Gaza now is funded with US taxpayer dollars. These are our bombs.”

As we turn, together, from the Works of War, which destroy communities and ecosystems, which poison human bodies and bodies of water, which desecrate soil and societies, we must turn toward an alternative future imbued with environmental justice. Shuker emphasizes that “A failure to achieve environmental justice for Palestine will not only deepen Gazans’ suffering. It will also spill across boundaries and borders and affect Israel: environmental catastrophe does not require a passport to travel.”

May our calls for ceasefire bring an immediate end to the devastation in Gaza. May ceasefire be the beginning of a more total turning from the Works of War toward a world of mercy, justice, and mutual flourishing.

Jim is a member of Religious Studies Department at Iona University and member of Agape’s Mission Council.

Hermit Musings

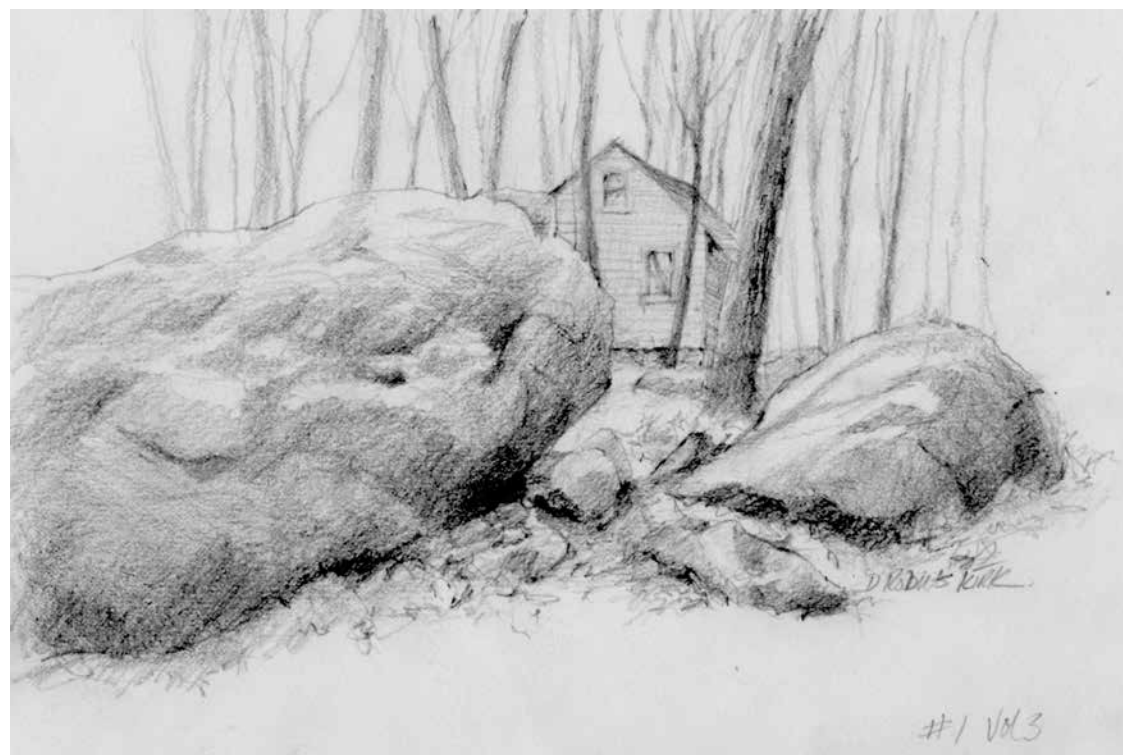
Thirteen years ago, Corinne Jager, an undergraduate at UMAss Amherst, made her first trip to Agape’s Hermitage and has been coming back ever since. Here is that “first impression.” Corinne recently returned to Agape and the hermitage for several days.

by Corinne Jager

For six days in late July, I hermitted. For a young, not specifically religious person who had never done any kind of retreat before, this was an admittedly peculiar thing to do. I, however, was just aching to arrive at Agape, walk myself to the hermitage, shut the door, be alone and be free.

After two buses and a van from Boston landed me in the Ware Walmart parking lot, Suzanne picked me up in the grease car, and we headed back to Agape. I was graciously welcomed by Brayton and company at work on the building project, summer interns harvesting the bountiful garden’s “kale forest,” others inside clearing up from community lunch. Toilet paper, water and other necessities were gathered, and I was led to my home for the week. I thanked my hosts, shut the door, and finally began the retreat I had spent weeks awaiting.

I came to the hermitage with a lot of undigested material from the first major events of my life. Overwhelmed by the awareness that I had poured my pitcher of energy and presence dry, and then some more, I was also grateful for the experiences I had while doing so. I was desperate for the relief I imagined I would feel arriving at the hermitage: a stepping away to gain the critical perspective from which I



Agape Hermitage

sensed it was important to reflect on those experiences.

But, once I got inside the hermitage and closed the door, nothing happened. No floodgates of relief or peace. “Don’t all come at once, now,” I cajoled my feelings. I settled my stuff in; I made some tea on the camping stove; I arranged the candles I would light at night. I waited. And, for the next few hours, I felt bored and frustrated, unsure of how to induce the feelings I had been so long anticipating would come naturally. Being by yourself for an extended period is very strange, and enforcing expectations over what that time is going to look like is even stranger.

Over the course of the week, I experienced a whole spectrum of emotions relating to my solitude: moments of boredom and frustration as well as anger and ecstasy and gratitude. Early on in this experiment with myself, I understood that if I was to get anything out of my time alone, I would have to give up the expectations I had for my experience that jailed me with frustration whenever they were not met. Maintaining this attitude of detachment, however, I discovered that my solitude could be endlessly fruitful.

An amazing aspect of life in a narrowed world, such as the hermitage, is that you can see more clearly each of the

fewer things you are looking at. I especially tried to practice this each morning when I got up early to shower and root around the kitchen for my day’s food and water in the main house before others awoke. Making my way down the hill in my morning delirium, I would suddenly be taken by the forest waking up. The light at dawn is stunning filtered by the stillness of leaves that are not yet disturbed by breeze. Only for a moment did I really notice this, with my eyes and my mind, though it is there in an equal state of awe *all the time*. And anything is so awesome when you really look at it.

When it came time for me to return to the real world of relationships and rent and food, I was satisfied. Not satisfied in the way I had wanted to feel when I arrive, not satisfied because my problems were any closer to solved, but satisfied with the awareness that any given thing has within it the infinite mystery and complexity that I just glimpsed in the trees each morning. Somehow, it was a consolation that the things I felt baffled by were forever, and that I didn’t have to be preoccupied and frustrated with their irresolution.

On my final day, I began to acclimate to the real world by participating in the life of the Agape Community. I was touched by Morning Prayer to learn that they had been praying for me all week, by the kind guitar mediation before lunch, and the intimacy of a candlelit homemade pizza dinner. This is a community whose daily life embraces the mystery I so rarely slow down enough to acknowledge. I couldn’t have asked for a more supportive environment for this kind of solitude.

“Why is my Enemy Suffering?”

A Response to Brayton Shanley's Essay of the same title is available on Agape's website www.agapecommunity.org.

by David O'Brien

The title is great for everyone--why does my enemy suffer? A challenging question in every war, one that arises immediately when the heart and consciousness are located first within humanity.

Thanks for sharing the special passion you must feel after a long lifetime of commitment to nonviolence and solidarity with Jews and Muslims, American Jewish colleagues and friends who love Israel and Moslem persons you have come to know and peace movement friends who have connected you with suffering Palestinians.

There is a balance here of outrage at atrocities, compassion for all innocent victims--children, women, bystanders, even on October 7 Arab citizens of Israel and Arab and Israeli peacemakers, and later in Gaza peacemakers, medical and relief people trying to help amid the deliberate violence and near total wreckage. And you don't stand back but want to support in prayer those trying to negotiate a cease-fire and some sort of political settlement, even if they come from states and communities connected to the violence.

Nonviolence is your clear commitment. “Just peace» is the goal, supported in even the most difficult places like Israel, the West Bank and Gaza. The people you know and have supported as best you could have given themselves to that goal. Amid wars, you share the “anguish” I talk about in my musings about Pope Francis and, at least at a moment, President Zelensky.

In Bob Meagher's book *Albert Camus and the Human Crisis* there is a moment when Camus suggests that he worries



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about anyone who is absolutely sure they are right. I think of several of John Paul II's comments, like those of Pope Francis, sure about not killing and the NO! to war, and especially to deliberate, calculated, conscious killing and, equally important, ideas designed to render such killing justified. But, with Camus, who shared that commitment, they---and we---are never sure about what the next step should be, what to do, and I think at the end of the book about Camus and now in Gaza the word anguish would again be the right word.

As a footnote: years ago David Hollenbach, after a long discussion of human rights and solidarity in Latin America, wrote that it was possible in the name of the faith to identify, name, a moral injustice, and to say in the name of the faith that Christians should act to address that injustice, but it was not possible to say in the name of the faith, this or that action was the required action. (Example: Christians for socialism, not Christian socialism)

That line corresponded to my study of and experience of US Catholic social thought and ministry. It still does. And that is where, I think, Camus' “doubt and uncertainty” and what I call “anguish” comes in—when it comes to an urgent situation of human suffering---so clearly and so troubling in Ukraine and Gaza and a dozen other places on the globe. You suggest listening closely, prayer and healing. From there it's back to the peace studies workbench with Paul Walker to come up with peace building public policies, finding paths to peace as best we can.

Dave O'Brien is Professor of History Emeritus at Holy Cross, who, together with his wife, Joanne, have been lifetime friends of Agape co-founders.

A Fast unto Death with My Friend Barry

by Brayton Shanley and Suzanne Belote Shanley

One of the most interesting twists of fate in my life was meeting again, at a high school reunion, a close childhood friend, Barry Winkelman. He had with him a copy of my book “The Many Sides of Peace,” had read it and commented that he was “amazed” by the description of Agape and wanted to visit the community. Barry seemed like an odd candidate to arrive at Agape: a nonpracticing Jew, functional atheist, former military combat Veteran, (Viet Nam), suffering from PTSD after watching fellow students fall and die in the line of fire at Kent State.

He did indeed show up at Agape about four years ago, faithfully returning once or twice a year to join the community life for weeks at a time. Waking up at 5 am every morning to write poetry, he was always sure to be the first at morning prayer at 7:30. A deep soul who with his AA training spoke the truth from his heart, Barry was never afraid to weep with tears of joy or sorrow. An avid hiker, he was a vigorous, talented, and fearless worker on the Agape homestead.

Although 74 when he arrived, he seemed ageless. A faithful attendee at morning prayer, Barry smilingly confessed that occasionally, he enjoyed attending Mass with his wife Susan. After 25 years of drinking, AA saved him and put him on the right road. The love he felt at Agape reminded him of AA fellowship, making him a natural at community bonding with everyone. A constant worker, he was always doing the dishes, sweeping the floor, and tidying up.

I received a call from Barry last August, expecting him to set up a time to schedule his yearly stay at Agape. Instead, he had some very tough news. Diagnosed with ALS a few months earlier, he was already having a difficult time walking and didn't think he was strong enough to make the trip from Maryland to Massachusetts. He had been exposed to Agent Orange in Viet Nam,

a known cause of ALS, this tragic reality, making necessary medical services from the Veterans Administration.

His doctors were honest with him, this deadly pattern was likely to continue. It was clear to Barry that the hope of any real quality of life was over. “Why even treat this disease?” he asked me? “I have already lost the ability to do everything I really enjoy.”

Barry, having already investigated physician assisted suicide, gave us both a chance

His wife, Susan, and the local hospice were looking after him, but he preferred to be in a patient hospice program with 24-hour care. Having found an in-patient facility, he was hoping to start the fast by early January.

We needed some professional guidance with hospice people who might be experienced with fasting unto death. I called a close friend, Barbara Segal, a former hospice program director in Vermont, who had accompanied patients with ALS who chose



Barry hauling wood at Agape.

to discuss what the dying process might look like. I mentioned fasting to Barry, as a time-honored spiritual practice, explaining that I had known people who had, when their bodies succumbed to terminal disease, voluntarily stopped eating and drinking. He seemed impressed with the idea, and we agreed to keep in close phone contact.

In early December Barry called to tell me that he was in bed and unable to move, saying, “There is nothing left to live for.”

to die voluntarily by stopping all eating and drinking.

Barbara predicted a 10-day process to die, a likely peaceful death with morphine available for any pain. Barbara was just the guide we needed. I told Barry I would come to Maryland to join him in the fast. It was January 2, and he was, without reservation, ready to begin the journey into death.

“How should we spend our time together? Should I bring a Bible?” I queried Barry.

“No,” he insisted, “do not bring a Bible.” I tried again: “How about poetry and music?” “Sure,” he agreed. Barry had a daily practice of writing poems, and I knew he loved Bob Dylan's songs.

For a while, at the end of December, I began feeling sick enough to see a doctor, who gave me the painful and untimely news that I had walking pneumonia. Now, the fact that I had to stay in bed myself meant that the sacred journey to Barry's death bed was not possible, a plan we had arrived at together over the last months. To be unable to be present and fast alongside this dying brother in the ineffable mystery of his crossing over was a heartbreaking disappointment.

Then, an angel appeared. Tina Donaldson, an old friend of Barry's showed up at his bedside, saw the need and offered to cover the majority of the 10 day fast. Tina took calls and hosted visitors when Barry's wife, Susan, was not able to be there.

After the third day, Barry ceased talking but was awake and aware of what was happening. Tina answered the phone and made sure that Barry understood who was calling and what was being said to him.

Tina reported that Barry seemed at peace, with Tina and Susan at his side and the steady stream of visitors and calls from friends and family from around the country. I called once a day, shared stories, and memories of our youth together, sang Bob Dylan songs: “Knock on Heaven's Door”, “Forever Young”, “Bob Dylan's Dream,” and more. According to Tina, while listening, Barry opened his eyes periodically.

Suzanne chose some of Barry's most memorable poems, some of them written while here at Agape, spiritedly reading them back to Barry in his last hours. In the late evening of January 12, exactly ten days into the fast, Barry passed on into eternal life. In life, Barry wasn't sure about God, but God certainly gave this good man, some blessed last days on the earth and peaceful passage into the heavenly embrace.



College students working in Agape garden.

To the Next Generation: A Radical Nonviolent Call

by The Agape Community

The Agape Community is a lay Catholic residential community, Interfaith in practice and outreach.

We are actively seeking new members to help steward 34 acres of Nipmuc land next to the Quabbin watershed and two main residences, St. Francis House, and St. Brigid House.

Since Agape's founding in 1982, community members, interns and volunteers practice living out their faith while being guided by the life of Jesus and the gospel of nonviolence He embodies.

We are seeking new members, who can continue Agape's 41-year legacy of the practice of nonviolence. Grounded in contemplative prayer, environmental sustainability, and simplicity, we encourage the practice of nonviolence from a Christian and/or Interfaith perspective.

Agape is a gender and racially inclusive community, open to all.

In addition, the Agape core community and its Mission Council anticipate that new community members would be drawn to live in an intentional faith community close to the land.

The ideal life stage for new members is the ages of 30's to 40's. Some previous community experience is preferred. Currently, we have accommodation for only single applicants. However, we encourage married couples with children to inquire about how Agape community life might be possible for them in the future.

After forty-one years of shared ministry, Agape co-founders Brayton Shanley and Suzanne Belote Shanley are looking to pass on their stewardship role in the community and assume their place as community elders.

We, as Agape's Mission Council, are assisting our co-founders in finding younger community members who are inspired to follow the Spirit's creative guidance and help shepherd Agape into the future.

Profile of Life in Community

- Participate in Prayer: Join in daily readings, silence, song, and Interfaith poetry, and music.
 - Maintain buildings, gardens, and grounds, and cut firewood for use in both community residences, St. Francis, and St. Brigid Houses.
 - Offer Hospitality: Welcome and direct guests and interns as well as plan community events.
 - Facilitate Agape's office which includes publication of the journal, Servant Song, fundraising and office outreach to parishes, schools, colleges, and peace communities.
 - Engage in dialogue and nonviolent witness in the wider community on issues of peace, war, and social justice.
 - Organize Community Retreats and Events.
 - Reach out to people in need in the region.
 - Members are encouraged to employ their own gifts of creativity and innovation in the life of Agape. We offer free room and board, as well as coverage of living expenses and stipend according to need.
- If you are called to this opportunity for living a life of faith within The Agape Community, we welcome your inquiry. Please Check out Agape Community's Website www.agapecommunity.org. peace@agapecommunity.org. 413-967-9369

"Jesus is going to rise from the Rubble" means that Christians of conscience are going to stand up against the injustices done to the Innocent civilians in the Holy Land, and the end is going to be bad and sad for the oppressors. This may not happen in our lifetimes. Media is manipulated and influenced by corrupt forces. It is greed and money which speaks. An obvious brutal genocide is being committed, right in front of the eyes of the whole world.

We pray to God Almighty to protect the innocents and let there be some kind of PEACE!"

M. Saleem Bajwa, Islamic Society of Western Mass, has been a presence in Agape's interfaith programs since 2016.

"I've been combining Quaker Meetings with Insight Meditation. I began reading Eckhart Tolle about 4 years ago, which has led me to so much that I previously had not know about Buddhism. So hard to stay focused on the present, though. At least I know how much of a trickster my mind is. I'm convinced that the collective minds of humans on Earth have led us to this point where we are threatened with our own extinction and many other forms of life."

Daniel Sicken, friend of 40 years, assisted in the building of Francis House, is a Plowshare activist, a tax resister, and a musician.

Response to Brayton Shanley's essay, "Why is my Enemy Suffering?"

"Your essay challenges us to examine how we contribute to war and suffering by holding fast to our judgements and fears. My empathy for the incarcerated of Gaza has made me forget to evaluate the attack by Hamas with the lens of nonviolence. I have wanted to justify, not just explain, Hamas' attack. As a follower of the nonviolent Jesus, I cannot justify any violence, even if I don't know what else to do.

You make the 'solution' rest equally on both sides, and I don't agree with that. The US must stop funding Israel; Israel must stop dehumanizing and brutalizing an entire population. Without peeling back, the layers of this fetid onion - back to 1917 - we can say that people who are badly treated will revolt in the language they have been taught. And we know that language is the language of war and violence."

Sherrill Hogen has been a frequent presence at Agape on work days and events, and joined the Women's Grief Circle in February.

"The times have been dark. The tragedy of Israel-Palestine continues to deepen, with every so-called victory a further tragedy. Will we find a path forward to humanity after this plunge into ever greater inhumanity? Will Israel at some point tell the world its plan for peace - if there is a plan? And what sort of peace?"

Our friends here who are Jewish are drawn closer to Israel in solidarity after the October 7th attack by Hamas. Now, they watch with increasing pain the devastation and terrible loss of life and hope in Gaza. Solidarity shifts towards loyalty and defense of the indefensible. Conversation becomes more difficult. History is not in dispute, but fear is more important than facts."

Frank Schweigert, MN, long-time friend of Agape with his wife Kathy and four children, did a family internship at Agape in the 90's.

The Heroic Death of Aaron Bushnell

by Dr. Robert Emmet Morris

"The media is already massaging this death as an act of an abnormal person committing an abnormal act. Far from that, this is a heroic act, an act of total unselfishness, an act of finality.

O' infinite consolation! Arron Bushnell died for our sins of omission and commission. He died for our laziness. He died for our failure to act to prevent genocide.

Arron Bushnell is no more an abnormal person than was Jesus Christ who died for our sins two millenniums ago. Arron Bushnell is in heaven and heaven is richer for that. Don't let the corrupt media take over the story."

Rob is a founding member of Veterans for Peace in Boston, MA who sponsors an orphanage in Viet Nam, Mai Tam House, with ongoing funding.



Agape members and volunteers pose after a yoga class.



Stonehill College Anti-Racist group at Agape retreat.

HUMANITY | from page 2

weapons, arsenals and, disarm our hearts. But how?

We must overcome fear. Isn't a weapon simply a palpable, lethal sign of our fear? Fear of being invaded and taken over by the enemy? Fear of losing our land, our property, our money, our "freedom?"

We Americans are quite comfortable being number one, the modern worlds'

Empires. We have earned the right to our unjust material advantages protected by our \$900 billion dollar defense budget. We give over 50 cents of every tax dollar to our war-like Empire. Now our tax dollars are drenched in fear. As Christians who live in the light of Jesus, we are not fundamentally Americans who happen to be Christians but are Christians who happen to be Americans. That Christianity is our identity; that is who we are; we do not follow Caesar;

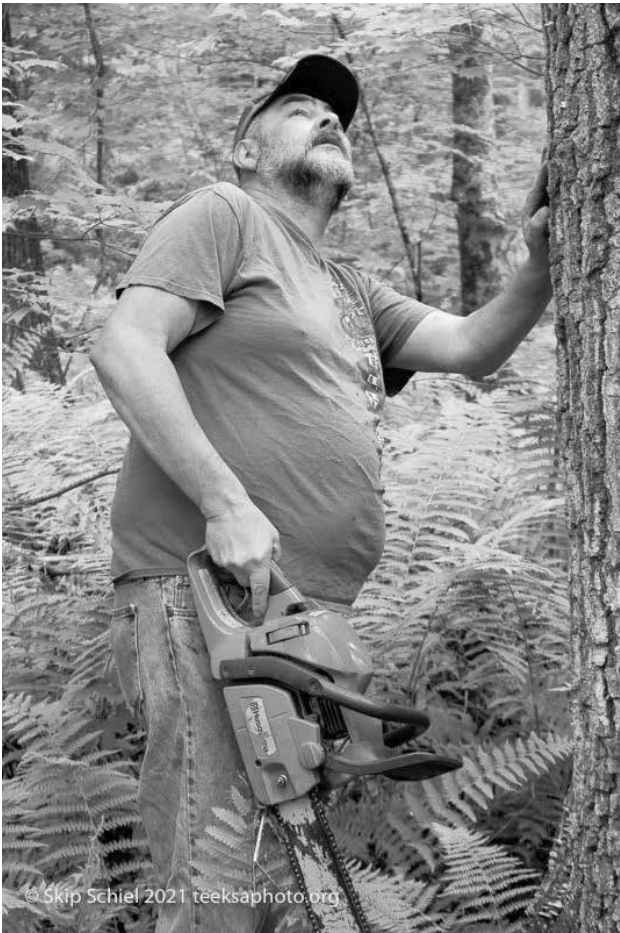
we follow a nonviolent God in Jesus with a willingness to pay the price.

The way out of this fear-driven insanity is a love that will transform our morbid fear of life into a spirit of loving-kindness that looks to the needs of others before our own avaricious greed and fixation on self. In Christ we must struggle valiantly to love our enemies, caring that our enemy is suffering the same fear. This steady practice will empower us to overcome the dreaded

specter of our death. The disciple of Jesus' nonviolent love finally gets it; it's better to die, than to kill. As Baptist pacifist and preacher Clarence Jordan declared: "Dying aint a problem in the New Testament, killing's the problem."

Is this our last chance as a human race? Really? Only nonviolent love can save us now.

News Notes



Mike Hope

in Memoriam, March 24, 2023

Mike Hope arrived at Agape's doorstep, homeless, looking for a room, a place to lay his head, after what he described as horrible and humiliating nights at shelters in Springfield and years living in his truck. Mike's second relationship was over; he had three children, and, after several heart attacks and attempts at being a handyman, he couldn't make it financially.

"Handsome", I thought to myself as Mike sat on the couch, "soft spoken," "easy to like." He was in his 40's. I went to the office in the basement for referral numbers to Catholic Worker houses. Upon my return, I found Mike, head in hands, sobbing quietly on the Agape couch.

I could not let him go, and we at Agape never did. He moved into our "fallen to the ground tree house" as there were too many young interns in the main house, and he was an unknown. The interns, everyone at Agape, embraced our good-natured friend, and we never fell out of love. He moved into Francis House and became our handyman for twelve years.

Mike became our everything...the go-to person for tree cutting, bench making, roof climbing, wood hauling, auto repair, fix-it man, raconteur, the young people couldn't get enough of his stories of growing up in poverty. Oh that smile.

After battling heart issues for years, unable to give up cigarettes, but wanting to, Mike died suddenly, sitting in a chair at his comfortable apartment in HUD housing in nearby Gilbertville. This time, it was my sobbing, close to the surface. How we loved you, Mike.

— Suzanne Belote Shanley



Jeanelle and Prateek

Jeanelle Wheeler, whom we refer to as life time, "in utero" member of Agape, whose mother, Teresa, is on Agape's Mission Council, will marry, Prateek, in RI on June 16th. Jeanelle is a Brown graduate, has been a Fulbright scholar, a world traveler, who brings her spirit of nonviolence wherever she lands.



Brigid Nite 2024 Aria Killough-Miller on Fiddle

Agape welcomes volunteers to assist with preparing our garden, homesteading tasks, and office work. Please call Agape.



Some of the crowd at Agape's 2023 St. Francis Day - the theme was "How to live a life of nonviolence grounded in contemplative practice."

SUPPORT SERVANT SONG

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Calendar

June 8th 9 am to 5pm

with vegan pot-luck to follow.

Come join Agape's oldest tradition of cutting, splitting and stacking wood, give the garden a boost, landscape and plant wildflowers, joyful hard work, tailored for all ages.

Raindate is June 22.