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Education or Mind Infection

Dr. Nurit Peled-Elhanan is a Lecturer in Language Education at Hebrew University in Jerusalem specializing in discourse in Israeli education with emphasis on visual and verbal presentation of Palestinian and non-western Jews. In September 1997, Nurit's daughter Samarder was killed by a Palestinian suicide bomber. She and her family are members of the Palestinian and Israeli Bereaved Families for Peace. Her two elder sons are active in the peace movements of the Refusenik and Combatants for Peace, a new movement of Israeli and Palestinian ex fighters. Dr. Peled-Elhanan is the recipient of the European Parliament 2001 Sakharov Prize for Human Rights and Freedom of Thought. She is now touring the US together with a Palestinian women (Hanan Abu Ghosh) who lost her 17 year old brother to Israeli gunfire.

Education or mind infection?
By Nurit Peled-Elhanan

Speech given at Connecticut College, New London, CT 09/27/06

I would like to dedicate these words to all the Palestinian boys and girls,
and to all the Lebanese boys and girls, and to all the Iraqi boys and girls
who have been massacred by mind-infected Israeli and American soldier boys,
and who have recently joined my own little girl in the underground kingdom
of dead children, which is growing under our feet as I speak. I would like

to tell them not to worry: "You will be well received there, children,
and
no one will hurt you just because you wandered off on your way to
school or
because you wore a scarf on your head or because you lived in a
certain
place. Rest in peace, everyone is equally worthy in your new world.
This is
the world where Israeli children dwell side by side with Palestinian
children. There they lay, victims and murderers, whose bloods have
long been
absorbed by the holy land which has always been indifferent to
blood. There
they rest, all of them, victims of deceit.

All of you dead children were deceived, because your death has
achieved
nothing at all and the world goes on living as if your blood had never
been
shed. Because the leaders of the world keep playing their murderous
games,
using you as their dice and our grief as fuel for their killing machines.
Because Children are abstract entities for generals and grief is a
political
tool. Living at both sides, that of the victims and that of the killers, I
keep asking myself, what are the means by which good Israeli
children are
turned into murdering monsters, what are the means by which they
are so
mind-infected as to kill and torture and humiliate other children, their
parents and grandparents, and sacrifice their own life for nothing but the
folly and megalomania of their chiefs. In the so-called Western
enlightened
world everyone feels very well-founded when they blame Islam for
suicide
bombing and terror. But who would ever blame Judaism for murder?
And yet,
Ultra Orthodox Jewish children who have never left Brooklyn know
that to kill
Arabs is a 'mitzva' (holy commandment) for they are 'vilde hayeths'
(wild
beasts). And Israeli children actually commit the crimes of slaughter
and
torture. Neither Judaism nor Islam nor any religion for that matter
are
the cause for murder and terror. Racist education is. American
imperialism
is, and Israeli ruthless regime of occupation is. The women and
children who
suffer most from western violence today are Muslim women but

racism has its way and the blame for their suffering is attributed to their being muslim.

The western world today is infected with fear of Islam and of the muslim womb. Great France of liberte egalite and fraternite is scared of little head-scarved girls, Jewish Israel calls in public speeches and schoolbooks the Arab citizens of Israel a demographic nightmare and the enemy from within. As for the Palestinians refugees living under occupation, they are defined in Israeli History schoolbooks as a 'problem to be solved". Not long ago the Jews were a problem to be solved.

This in spite the fact that the people who are destroying the world today are not muslim. The people who are using the most sophisticated disastrous weapons to kill thousand of innocent civilians are not Muslim. They are Christian, and Jewish. Nevertheless people who belong to the Judeo-Christian cultures, who support American-British and Israeli crimes against humanity, and particularly against Muslims all over the world, people who send their children to fight these ruthless useless wars in the name of democracy and freedom which are cover names for greed and megalomania, dare call themselves enlightened and blame it all on some imaginary clash of civilizations.. What does this fear-stricken world offer as a solution to Palestinian , Iraqi or Afgan people who are harassed, abused, tortured and famished by western crimes and exploitation? The general offer this enlightened world gives them is: Be like us. Constitute a Democracy like ours, embrace our values which despise you, which consider you an inferior primitive lot to be cultivated or cleansed away.

This, ladies and gentlemen is the attitude that permit American soldiers to rape, torture and kill muslim men women and children by the thousands, that permits Israeli soldiers to order Palestinian women to strip in front of their children for security reasons, jailers to keep them in inhuman conditions, without necessary hygienic aids, without clean water or

clean
mattresses and separate them from their breast-fed babies and
toddlers. To
block their way to education, to confiscate their lands, to destroy their
water wells, to uproot their trees and to prevent them from working
their
fields. This is what permits Israeli pilots to drop a hundred bombs of one
ton a day on the most crowded area in the world -Gaza. This is what
permits
Israel to issue racist laws that separate mothers from fathers and
children.
Palestinian Iraqi and Afgan women are mothers like me. And when
they lose a
child, even if it is one of 12, their pain is equal to mine. But in
addition
to losing their children they also lose their homes and their livelihood
and
their future because the world does not listen to their sufferings and
does
not punish their murderers. Their honour as women and mothers is
crushed.
Their identity is destroyed and their cry is not heard. their faith and
customs, their centuries-old ways of life are disregarded and despised.

Not only American soldiers but also Israeli soldiers who actually
perform
massacres of 'Arabs' - Palestinian or Lebanese - may never see an
Arab human
face until they are drafted to the army, but they learn, for 12 long
years,
that these people are primitive, bear children in order to send them to
the
streets and throw stones at our peace-keeping soldiers, uneducated
because
they don't receive our education, conniving and dirty because they
have
different notions about politeness, they dress differently and cover
their
heads with different pieces of cloth. Well, from my experience there
are
many more Kafiehs in the camp of peace lovers than there are kippas.
Israeli
children are deprived from knowing their immediate neighbours, their
history
and their culture and their merits. Israeli children are educated to see
their neighbours as an unwanted element. This is not education, this
is mind
infection.

The scientist Richard Dawkins was the first to speak about viruses of

the mind. Children, because their minds are gullible and open to almost any suggestion, are not immune to mental infections of all sorts of propaganda and fashion. They are easily persuaded to pierce their faces and tattoo their bottoms, to turn their hats around and bare their bellies, to believe in angels and fairies. They are equally easy to acquire political beliefs and to appropriate mental maps which will later influence their decisions on the question of the future borders of the state and on the necessity of war. All of Our children are mind-infected from an early age. So that by the time they are old enough to become real soldiers, they have already learned to be good soldiers, which means their minds are totally infected and they are incapable of questioning the 'truth' that has been inculcated to them. This is part of the explanation one can give to the terrible deeds that are committed today by good Israeli boys, who are characterized once and again as "people of values". Therefore it is high time to ask, what values are these? The following lines are part of a personal preface by Tal Sela, one of my university students to his term-paper, which included the analysis of a History textbook:

On the 5th of September 1997 I found myself in LEbanon , on a rescuing mission . All my friends were in the battle, 12 soldiers were killed. The following days I was happy: " I am alive, I survived" I said to myself. However, a year later I was in deep depression. Sad and morose. I decided to consult a psychologist. After a few sessions I was able to gather up my forces again, both physical and moral. I could reorganize my thoughts. Then I understood that the mental crisis I had was in fact a moral crisis, a crisis of consciousness. What I actually felt was frustration, shame and anger. . How could I be so gullible and let myself be duped? How can I explain that a man of peace, exposes himself to such a morbid experience of his own free will? Today, like every two weeks, I drove peace

activists to
the military check-points of the Israeli army in the occupied
Palestinian
territories. I saw an officer put tight handcuffs on a taxi driver
because
he failed to obey the soldiers' order to park here and not there. "We
told
him a thousand times" the soldiers said. The man was lying on the
ground in
the worst heat of the summer, thirsty, for hours on end. His friend
was
luckier: He had to stand on his feet, in a cell, without handcuffs.
What
pushes these young Israeli boys to play the rôle of supreme judges
until
they lose all judgment? In my opinion it is the Grand Zionist
Narrative
which serves as a collective conscience to the whole Israeli society,
explicitly as well as implicitly. This grand narrative is the system of
values that makes us belong to this particular collective.

This is the system that dictates the relationships between us and the
Palestinians. How else can one explain young people who were
educated to
love their neighbour as they love themselves killing their neighbours,
destroying their educational institutions, their libraries and their
hospitals, for no apparent reason other than their being neighbours?
The
only explanation is that their minds are infected by parents, teachers
and
leaders, who convince them that the others are not as human as we
are, and
therefore killing them is not real killing; it has other legitimating
names
such as "cleansing" "purifying", "punishment", "operation",
"mission",
"campaign" and "war". Although I speak about Israeli boys this is
not an
Israeli affair because, as you know, the epidemic is worldwide. My
nephew,
Doroni, 7 years old, who lives in the US, came home on Halloween
day and
said he wanted to be a soldier, and then to go to Iraq and save
America. How
many American young men, ignorant as he is of the absurdity of this
statement, actually went to Iraq and died there without knowing why,
but
with the words "save America" on their lips? The question is, how
were these
false values imprinted on their minds and how can they be erased?

The human psyche, says Dawkins, has two great sicknesses: the urge to carry vendetta across generations and the tendency to fasten group labels on people rather than see them as individuals. We all suffer because of labels, but only those of us who died because of labels have realized that the way to fight labels is to refuse labels. The way to defeat false value systems is to expose them. The viruses of the mind are only partially weakened by young people like Tal and other Israeli refuseniks such as 'Combatants for Peace'. But most of our mind infected children would not be free of the grip of those viruses until they find their final rest in the evergrowing, underground kingdom of dead children . Only there will they realize that it doesn't matter whether their head was bare or not in a synagogue or a church or a mosque, whether they were circumcised or not, whether they pronounced forbidden words, ate pig or cow or whether they had a hot chocolate after their salami pizza just before they were blown up by someone who didn't. Israeli, American, English, Italian mothers raise their children with all the love and care in order to sacrifice them to the god of death, as if their uterus is a national or rather an international asset. and fathers urge their children to commit themselves to armies whose interests have nothing to do with defense. And when these children die for the profits of somebody else their parents bear it with dignity and pride, as they were taught, put their dead children's photographs on the mantelpiece and sigh: He was so handsome in uniform. It is time to tell these parents that no-one is handsome in the uniform of brutality. It is time to tell them uniforms and ranks and medals have become ugly. Tell them their dignity and pride are misplaced. It is time to tell Jewish people that the only way to discourage anti-Semitism is by condemning the only government in the world who deliberately sends young Jewish boys and girls to their certain death and who persecutes to the point of genocide a whole Semitic nation, explain to them that it is the Jewish government and the actions of its army, not some primordial hatred for the Jewish race, which

are the reasons for the invention of the new sign we often see in pro-Palestinian demonstration, where the Star of David is equated with the swastika.

It is a terribly hard task for people who were educated in Israel or in the USA or in any other 'western' 'democratic' country, to admit we were raised on false racist values. On heterophobia. The only thing that can enhance such a change of spirit is the constant image of the mutilated small bodies of the victims of these values . Tomorrow is Yom Kippur, the holiest day for the Jews. On this day people are required to ask forgiveness. Not to forgive but to try and be forgiven. I would like to quote one stanza from a poem written by the late Hanoh Levin, one of Israel's greatest playwrights, in the 1970s:

Dear Father, when you stand on my grave
Old and tired and very lonely,
And you see how they burry me in the ground -
Ask me to forgive you my father.

We must all ask our children's forgiveness for not being more alert, for not fighting hard enough to keep our promises for a better world, for not refusing the evil viruses before and for letting them be the victims of the horrible, mental infection we are all suffering from, to look at their innocent, astonished, disillusioned small faces and ask ourselves: why does that streak of blood rip the petal of their cheek???