

## Hibiscus, Figs and Olive Trees. A Poem.

By Michael Fine

© Michael Fine 2023

The hibiscus flowers are orange-red, pink or white.

The figs are purple-brown and sweet, the fruit interlaced on the stems with dark green leaves as broad as a big man's hand, held open.

The olive trees are gnarled and old, their grey-green leaves stuck on old wood, an afterthought.

The birds chirp and rustle in the pomegranate bushes next to the stream beds that flow out of the wadis,

or they glide high in the air, surfing the thermals, searching for prey

or they caw after dawn, black and arrogant.

Or they alight together, a huge flock that moves together in the sky.

The air, sweet with pollen, also smells of sulfur and decay. Sometimes it carries sea breezes. Sometimes it carries rockets, missiles, bombs and drones.

Stop this madness now.

Free the hostages. Stop the missiles. Stop the rockets. Stop the bombs. End the siege. Tell the truth.

No path to peace goes through the murder of children, of mothers and grandmothers, of engineers and doctors or farmers or plumbers or poets. Through beheadings. Through machine gunnings. Or through bombs dropped on houses, regardless of what tunnels lie beneath.

Death is the same for the children of Be'eri, Khan Yunis, Nahal Oz, Jenin, Re'im, Jabaliya, Nir Yitzak, Gaza, and Sderot. Kfar Aza and Nir Oz.

The children, their parents, the grandmothers  
keening with their losses or dead in their houses,  
their dried blood on the wall behind them  
or crushed under a building just bombed, they are all gone,  
their lives sucked away as rescuers scramble to find them,  
the skin on the rescuers' fingertips ripped off as they claw through the rubble. The  
dead are equal in death. Those left behind equal in heartbreak. In anger. In fear.  
Those lost are equal in their absence. Hope mowed down or crushed.  
Disemboweled or beheaded. Love lost. The soul of all things diminished.

Stop this madness. G'noogk! Day Kvar! Kafee! Enough!

It is madness to think that the slaughter of civilians is ever justified; that you will make more fighters by this action; that you will reclaim the land or a land or a lost life; that you will eliminate the threat; that you create hope out of gunfire or drones. All you do is kill and maim. The slaughtered will haunt your dreams. You will never sleep.

The experts prattle on about true and false equivalence. About anti-Semitism and bigotry on the one side and genocide on the other. The world has too much of both. Neither justifies one more death.

Here's the truth: we are killing each other and use these words to justify what should never be tolerated by any of us. Not once. Not ever.

It is madness to think that killing civilians is ever justified.  
It is madness to think that killing combatants can ever be a pathway to peace.  
It is madness to think that butchering innocent people can ever be a pathway to peace.  
It is madness to think that human beings can ever be just collateral damage.

It is madness to think that one side is right and one side is wrong.  
It is madness to keep blaming history.

History ended a moment ago. People are dying now.

People want only to walk with their children today in the late afternoon light.  
To play football. Today  
To sing together and apart. Today  
To sing in the shower. Today.  
To raise their voices together in prayer. Today. To praise G-d, to praise HaShem and Allah, the Omnipresent and All-Knowing, the unity in multiplicity, the force that drives all flesh. Separately and together. One.

To hear the doves today cooing in the morning and at dusk, the babblers and the serins and the chiffchaffs and the buntings.

It is madness to think that cutting off water and electricity to a whole people is anything other than collective punishment.

It is madness to think that rocket attacks on cities and farms, or sending incendiary balloons to set fields on fire, is anything other than collective punishment.

It is madness to think that collective punishment does anything other than make the punished your enemies forever, from generation to generation, from war to war, from tit to tat, from strength and love to weakness, death, heartbreak and despair.

It is madness to think that terrorism does anything other than turn the victims and their families into your enemies forever, from generation to generation, from war to war, from tit to tat, from strength and love to weakness, death, heartbreak and despair.

Stop this madness.

Free the hostages. Stop the missiles. Stop the rockets. Stop the bombs. Stop enabling madness by silence, by inaction, by tolerating lies and spreading lies, by sending arms and aircraft carriers, by kissing the hands of murderers, the hands drenched in blood.

It is madness to think that an incendiary bomb will ever make peace. It is madness to think that a suicide bomber will ever make peace. A roadside bomb. A sniper's bullet. A knife. Artillery fire.

It is madness to think that the destruction of houses or cutting down olive trees will ever make peace.

It is madness to think that rockets defeat humiliation. Rockets kill people. Your rockets are *evidence* of humiliation, the humiliation that comes from our failure to be human, to make peace and find a way to live together, however fraught.

It is madness to think that settlements create security.  
It is madness to talk of ending this once and for all, to think that people on the other side are ever going away.

Stop this madness.

You don't understand, you tell me. What they will do to us if we don't do it to them first. How first we must defeat these animals. How we must destroy the Zionist enemy. How we must hit them back ten times when they hit us. How we must mow the lawn.

What I understand is that no animal would do to its own kind what human beings do to each other,  
with a suicide vest,  
a knife,

a gun,  
a roadside bomb,  
a missile,  
an artillery shell,  
a minefield  
or a bomb dropped from five thousand feet.

They will slit our throats as soon as we turn our backs. They take our land. They imprison us, punish us, they humiliate us, they think they can beat us into submission.

No. *You* don't understand, I answer back. There is no way to peace. Peace is the way.

Stop this madness.

Stop the missiles. Stop the rockets. Stop the bombs. Free the hostages. Tell the truth. The whole truth and nothing but the truth. Allahu Akbar. Elohim Gadol.

We have been doing the same thing over and over for a hundred years. A thousand years. Five thousand years and more. Has hitting back hard ever helped? Has terror ever brought back any person, any land, any olive tree?

Security through love, not violence.  
Strength only through democracy and justice.

Stop it everywhere, or we will live forever in this vortex of hatred and fear. Or we will destroy everything, that land and this land, as we burn ourselves to a crisp, as we set the world on fire.

We are not obligated to complete the work. Nor are we permitted to turn away from it. G-d gave Noah the rainbow sign. No more water. The fire next time.

Shall we destroy the earth to punish the other? When one of us turns away from injustice, when one of us turns our back or tells a lie or raises our hand in anger or shouldered a gun or fires a missile or drops a bomb, then violence and injustice, the twin fires of our mutually assured destruction, rage out of control.

There is no way to peace. Peace is the way.

Return the hostages. End the siege. Stop the missiles. Stop the bombing. Tell yourselves and ourselves the truth.

We are one people, one body, whatever the demagogues, the criminals and fools, the smart money wants us to believe.

One people.

One.

Who will survive together or together set the world afire.

No more water. The fire next time.

There are no war crimes. War is a crime, and everyone who pursues war are criminals.

The big men with big words, the smart money, profit from war. They profit while everyone else suffers, and from all the suffering. *They* are the enemy, no one else. *They* are who we must stop, who we must stop following and voting for and giving our money to, once and for all.

Who we must never believe. Never again!

We do not own the land. The land belongs only to G-d, to HaShem and Allah.

We come from dust and will return to dust.

There is only one G-d, the force that drives all flesh. War destroys the flesh that only G-d can make.

Those who make war are murderers. Those who worship war are idolators.

The land belongs only to G-d. We are a passing shadow. A faint whisper. A breath taken and exhaled. We come from dust and will return to dust.

All that matters is what we do

in this instant, this very moment, this blink of an eye, while we can still stand upright, speak and act.

There was a bomb. But G-d was not in the bomb.

There was a missile. But G-d was not in the missile.

There was a drome. But G-d was not in the drome.

There was a rocket. But G-d was not in the rocket.

G-d was not in the knife or the gun or the suicide vest or the artillery shell or the roadside bomb or the checkpoint or the laws or the press releases or the political campaigns.

After the bombs and missiles came the sound of perfect silence.

Who are we? Who have we been? Who have we become? Who must we be?

The still small voice whispers: all we have is life, and life is made holy or not by what we choose and what we do. What we say and think. What we believe and hope for. By what we permit or fail to stop.

The hibiscus flowers are orange-red, pink or white.

The figs are purple-brown and sweet, the fruit interlaced on the stems with dark green leaves as broad as a big man's hand, held open.

The olive trees are gnarled and old, their grey-green leaves stuck on old wood, an afterthought.

The birds chirp and rustle in the pomegranate bushes next to the stream beds that flow out of the wadis,

or they glide high up, riding the thermals, searching for prey,

or they caw after dawn, black and arrogant.

Or they alight together, a huge flock in the sky that moves together.

If I am not for myself, who will be? If I am only for myself, what am I? If not now, when?

Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord.

Free the hostages. End the siege. Stop the rockets and missiles. Stop the bombing.  
Tell the truth.