

Gaza: A Place Closer to Hell Than to Heaven

By [Irwin Jerome](#)

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The recent confessional “I Like Gaza”, written by Uri Avnery –Peace Activist, Journalist, founding member of the peace bloc Gush Shalom, former publisher and editor-in-chief of the news magazine Haolam Hazeh, founding member of the Knesset, founding member of the Israeli Council for Israeli-Palestinian Peace, and columnist for Internet – will break the heart of anyone who has ever anguished over the plight of the Palestinian peoples; especially over the ensuing long decades since the Zionists first invaded Palestine in 1948, with the blessings of the world, and Israel ever since has continued its heinous, incessant racist, apartheid persecution of the Palestinian people, again with the continued blessings of the world.

Sadly, this persecution now includes the Palestinian peoples themselves, caught in the grip, as they are, of a fatal death spiral as they viciously fight and squabble; as oppressed peoples predictably often do amongst themselves once their forced to ‘circle the wagons’ and then begin shooting each other over what few scraps of power and hegemony remain. What is now occurring in Gaza could spell the final chapter in this ugly saga of what human beings everywhere, since time immemorial, seem hopelessly destined to do to one another in whatever contentious theatre of human endeavor.

Meanwhile, the world – in the body of the United Nations and all its affiliate nations, organizations and bodies – either intentionally fosters or helplessly and hopelessly looks on and, as it has done on so many previous occasions of mayhem in recent human history, makes what few anguished, obligatory, hollow gestures and responses, like it has done for nearly 70 years in the case of the Palestinians, while nothing appreciably changes for the better but only the worse.

Uri Avnery poignantly writes,



Uri Avnery (Source: [Wikimedia Commons](#))

"I HAVE a unique confession to make: I like Gaza! Yes, I like this far-away corner of Palestine, the narrow strip on the way to Egypt, in which two million human beings are crowded, and which is closer to hell than to heaven.

My heart goes out to them. I HAVE spent quite a lot of time in the Strip. Once or twice I stayed there with Rachel for a couple of days. I became friendly with some people whom I admired, people like Dr. Haidar Abd-al-Shafi, the leftist doctor who set up the Gazan health system, and Rashad al-Shawa, the former Mayor, an aristocrat from birth.

After the Oslo agreement, when Yasser Arafat came back to the country and set up his office in Gaza, I met him there many times. I brought to him groups of Israelis. On his first day there he sat me on the dais next to him. A photo of that occasion now looks like science fiction.

I even came to know the Hamas people. Before Oslo, when Yitzhak Rabin deported 415 Islamic activists from the country, I took part in setting up protest tents opposite his office. We lived there together, Jews, Christians and Muslims, and there Gush Shalom was born.

After a year, when the deportees were allowed back, I was invited to a public reception for them in Gaza and found myself speaking to hundreds of bearded faces. Among them were some of today's Hamas leaders. Therefore I cannot treat the inhabitants of the Gaza Strip as a faceless gray mass of people. I couldn't stop thinking about them during last week's terrible heat wave, about all the people - the men and women, the old, the children, the toddlers, the babies - languishing in awful conditions without electricity and air conditioning, without clean water, without medicines for the sick. I thought about those living in the houses severely damaged in the last wars and not repaired since. My heart was bleeding, and asking, "Who was to blame?"

Yes, WHO IS to blame for this ongoing atrocity? ACCORDING TO the Israelis, "the Palestinians themselves are to blame". Fact: the Palestinian leadership in Ramallah has decided to reduce the electricity supply to Gaza from three hours a day to two. (The electricity is supplied by Israel and paid for by the Palestinian Authority). This seems to be true. The conflict between the Palestinian Authority, ruled by Fatah, and the Palestinian leadership in Gaza,

ruled by Hamas, has come to an ugly climax.

The uninvolved bystander wonders: how can that be? After all, the entire Palestinian people are in existential danger. The Israeli government tyrannizes all Palestinians, both in the West Bank and in the Gaza Strip. It keeps the Strip under a strangling blockade, on land, in the sea and in the air, and is setting up settlements all over the West Bank, to drive the population out. In this desperate situation, how can the Palestinians fight each other, to the obvious delight of the occupation authorities?

That is terrible, but, sadly, not unique. On the contrary, in almost all liberation struggles, something similar has happened. During the Irish struggle for independence, the freedom fighters fought against each other and even shot each other. During our own struggle for statehood, the Haganah underground turned Irgun fighters over to the British police, who tortured them, and later shot up a ship bringing recruits and arms to the Irgun. But these and many other examples do not justify what is happening now in Gaza. The struggle between Fatah and Hamas on the backs of two million people condemns these to inhuman living conditions. As an old friend of the Palestinian people in their fight for liberation, I am deeply saddened.

BUT THERE are more partners to the atrocious blockade on Gaza. Israel can blockade the Strip only on three sides. The fourth side is the Egyptian border. Egypt, which has in the past fought four major wars against Israel on behalf of the Palestinian brothers (in one of which I was wounded by an Egyptian machine-gunner) is now participating in the cruel blockade on the Strip.

What has happened? How did it happen? Everyone who knows the Egyptian people knows that it is one of the most attractive peoples on earth; a very proud people; a people full of Humor, even in the most trying circumstances! Several times I have heard in Egypt phrases like: "We do not like the Palestinians very much, but they are our poor cousins, and we cannot abandon them under any circumstances!" And yet here they are, not only abandoning, but cooperating with the cruel occupation."

This writer, like so many others who feel compassion for the Palestinians and anguish what can be done to alleviate their situation, is deeply moved by Uri Avnery's commentary. And now, unfortunately, we must continue to turn to yet another raw, gaping wound of the human spirit, and as yet unresolved debacle of the human condition, called Syria!

OMG! Will Things Never Be Otherwise Until the Human Race Finally Expunges Itself?

Jerome Irwin is a freelance writer and author of "The Wild Gentle Ones; A Turtle Island Odyssey" (www.turtle-island-odyssey.com), a three volume account of his travels as a spiritual sojourner, during the 1960's, 70's & 80's, among Native Americans & First Nations in North America. It encompasses the Spiritual Renaissance & Liberation Movements among native peoples throughout North America during the civil rights era. In 2014, Irwin authored a series of articles on Israel, Gaza, Palestine and Syria ("Gaza & World's Collective Soul Besieged"; "Gaza at Christmas", "The Battle For Palestine", "Israeli Zionism" and "Syria's Civil War & Human Folly"). Irwin also is the publisher of The Wild Gentle Press

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