

# **Transforming trauma into healing: An integrative healing approach for Palestinians and Israelis**

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Despite numerous peace talks and international efforts, violence and tension continue to affect the lives of millions due to the ongoing Palestine-Israel conflict. As both sides feel they are victims, for peace to move forward, healing needs to occur on both sides through reflective entitlement and proposing an I-Thou stance which encourages each side to understand and connect more deeply with the another.

Following the Hamas takeover of the Gaza strip in 2007, Israel imposed an unprecedented blockage on all border crossings in and out of the Gaza strip, locking in 1.5 million people in one of the most densely populated areas on earth. This triggered a human dignity crisis with negative consequences on physical, social, mental, and economical levels.

In the latest eruption of violence this past month, the Israeli military and Palestinian militants in Gaza have been trading fire with air strikes and rocket attacks; more than 1,400 rockets have been fired toward Israel from Gaza militants while Israel has launched more than 1,500 strikes on the Gaza strip. UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon has called for an immediate ceasefire, but negotiation talks are far from being achieved. To date, 26 peace proposals have been placed, but none have succeeded; this conflict is reinforced by a multitude of complex and difficult issues as well as factors of ideology, religion, history, identity, and legitimacy.

One of the most serious obstacles to achieving reconciliation and peace is destructive entitlement, where each side expects reciprocity: when we give to others, we expect a fair return. If we believe that our giving is more than our receiving, we become vindictive and move into a spiral of endless retaliation of “you hurt me, I hurt you 100 times more”. Not only does this perception lead us to become unfair toward others, but it shields us from experiencing any remorse for our own unfairness, which leads to further damages. This destructive entitlement results in a malignant space where both Palestinians and Israelis see themselves as victims; both sides want the other to disappear; and both sides feel entitled to the entire land.

To move past this and promote healing, constructive entitlement must be practiced, where being generous toward one another can promote a sense of being in full control of what we give to others, even though we have no control over what we receive. Though painful, this type of experience can be freeing and empowering.

Martin Buber’s concept of *I-Thou* relationship can also promote healing between Israelis and Palestinians. This type of work involves examining situations from the vantage point of all parties involved, respecting the reality of others, and recognizing that the needs of the other are as valid as our own needs. Developing an *I-Thou* conversation allows the relationship to become fully authentic and when one side can listen to and imagine the pain of the other, healing can begin.

During a 2-day conference in Jerusalem, Dr. Ani Kalayjian facilitated this type of healing through the 7-step Biopsychosocial and Eco-Spiritual Model. Israelis and Palestinians shared with one another feelings of guilt, betrayal, pain and sadness. Healing groups were utilized to clear energy centers that had been blocked by both generational trauma and individual ongoing trauma. Though much work still needs to occur, this work exemplifies an approach for healing and transforming violent conflict into empathy, respect, and commitment to peace.

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