

## Eye for an Eye...

When somebody hurts you, it's only natural to want to hurt them back. Doesn't take a genius to work that out. But sometimes, people inflict the deepest kind of pain upon one another, one that not only hurts you but robs your entire world of meaning. The kind of pain where it no longer seems fair that the world still turns, the sun still rises and sets, as it hadn't witnessed the injustice that hurt you. People inflict this kind of pain upon one another. The kind of pain that the world ought not to be able to take, that should leave the earth crumbling under the weight of injustice. But the earth still stands, the sun still rises and sets. And because the sun still rises and sets, because it has turned a blind eye to your suffering, that world itself starts to feel like an enemy.

When somebody hurts you that much, when you can put a name on the person responsible for this injustice, it is not natural to hurt them back, because something deeper has happened. For a living being to have inflicted that level of pain upon you, they become inhuman in your eyes. They lose their status as human beings, and become nothing other than a 'they'. And when that human has become a 'they', you can do what you like to them, because 'they' are no longer a human. You would probably not say it like that, but in effect that seems to be what happens.

I wonder if this is why, the commandment not to murder is accompanied by the reminder that the person you might want to murder carries the image of God. The person who jolly well deserves to be murdered, is not a 'they', but a human being. In fact, in Jewish tradition, there used to be a phrase that put a limitation on the revenge one person could exact from another. "An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth." A just limit on the revenge that a descendent of Abraham can inflict upon another.

I would love to know what those, living in the State of Israel and support the attacks on Palestine, make of this rule, an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. Because in recent years, we have seen clearly enough how the rule really ought to read twenty eyes for an eye, twenty teeth for a tooth. The problem of escalating violence has always been there, not only for the descendants of Abraham, but according to Genesis, for other descendants of Adam.

*Lamech says, I have killed a man for wounding me, a young man for striking me. If Cain is avenged sevenfold, then Lamech is avenged seventy seven fold.*

It seems no less true for the state of Israel today. Now of course, the natural, sensible, diplomatic thing to say of the current conflict between Israel and Palestine, is to say that – well, there's suffering on either side, there is injustice on either side, both sides are as bad as each other, both sides are equally to blame, both sides must stop. To repeat that diplomatic, even-handed, unbiased, six of one half a dozen of the other routine, is either lazy, cowardly, or deliberately misinformed.

Of course, there are reasons why we might want to see it that way, reasons why we might like to see it as a balanced and just approach. Such misinformation is understandable because of the power of the Israeli propoganda machine. For instance, last week they released a video that clearly showed Palestinian terrorists loading Grad missiles onto a Hamas vehicle. You could see these people as clear as day. It was undeniable. The video was posted on You Tube, to show what the Israelis were having to face, and why they were having to defend themselves.

The truck and those near to were hit by an Israeli missile and killed. But then an Israeli humanitarian group went up close to investigate. It turned out, that a 55-year-old Gaza resident named Ahmed Sanur, claimed that the truck was his and that he and members of his family and his workers were moving oxygen cylinders from his workshop.

This workshop had been damaged when a building next door was bombed by the Israelis and he was afraid of looters. The Israeli human rights group B'Tselem put Mr Sanur's account on its website, together with a photograph of burned out oxygen cylinders. Mr Sanur said that eight people, one of them his son, had been killed. He subsequently told the Israeli newspaper Haaretz: "These were not Hamas, they were our children... They were not Grad missiles." If you're interested I can happily give you the links and sources for this.

But the Israeli propaganda machine is fulfilling its purpose well. Even a man as intelligent, as perceptive and as impartial as George W Bush is convinced that Hamas are responsible for causing the current crisis. So the Bush administration are explicitly supporting Israel, EU leaders are dithering and the British government refuses to condemn the disproportionate killing of Palestinians.

This approach is a green light for Israel to continue unavoidably indiscriminate attacks on the most densely populated territory in the world. To stop this, a change in the attitude of our own and other European governments is essential.

That requires an analysis that fits the facts. First, this is not a conflict between two equivalent forces. Hamas's weapons are crude and inaccurate missiles capable of causing fear, naturally, but not of damage or death remotely approaching the scale of what Israel has inflicted upon Gaza. An eye for an eye ?

Second, the blame for starting this cannot be given solely to Hamas. The original ceasefire, which expired on December 19, was violated from the beginning by Israel. From the start, it failed to end its illegal blockade of Gaza within the 10 days envisaged. Instead, it was tightened, cutting off food, fuel, medicine and all movement of people, in and out. Alongside this, Israel continued military attacks, killing more than 20 people during what was supposed to be a ceasefire.

That is why the majority of people in Gaza saw no point in renewing an agreement under which they were being slowly throttled. Israel 's government well understood that for a ceasefire to be meaningful, the siege of Gaza had to end. Instead, it tightened the screw to the point where it created enough tension to justify the present onslaught in the run-up to its elections.

Third, Gaza cannot be seen in isolation. It is part of a wider picture of systematic flouting by Israel of all efforts to broker peace with the Palestinians, as, for example, the illegal construction of settlements in the West Bank continues virtually unhindered.

For all of these reasons, the false pictures painted by western leaders that there is some kind of equivalence between the actions of Hamas and of Israel, or even that Israel is simply defending itself, must end. The way out of the immediate situation is obvious. Israel must call off its military campaign. The blockade of Gaza must end and Hamas must stop firing rockets

into Israel. That respects the right to life and security of both the Israelis and Palestinians. Hamas has said it would accept these terms.

But the Israeli government has made clear it has no intention of agreeing to such a reasonable way out. That is why international pressure to end the killing is essential. The present US administration will do nothing; it is to be hoped that Barack Obama will take a different approach when he takes office. In the meantime, it falls to the European Union and our own government to act.

The world's ability to turn a blind eye to the truth of these atrocities, at the same time as justifying a war to remove the evils inflicted by Saddam Hussein, is astounding !

An Eye for an Eye, a tooth for a tooth. It is too hard ! Israel hasn't managed it. Neither has the rest of the world. And what does Jesus say about this rule. An eye for an eye... He takes it in the opposite direction. It was a law that imposed a limit - no more than an eye for an eye, to prevent violence from escalating. And Jesus takes it in the opposite direction – don't even play that game. When someone insults you, hurts you, humiliates you – let the violence stop with you, and offer love in return.

It sounds a little bit fluffy. But a soldier, a hated Roman soldier, was allowed to commandeer your coat, and make you walk with him for two miles so he doesn't have to carry his pack.. And Jesus says – no, don't try and get revenge – don't even break the law. But he doesn't tell his listeners to obey the law either. He tells them to exceed what the law requires of them, because by doing that they undermine it. You want me to walk a mile with you – no, I won't – I'll carry your pack for two miles instead. If this soldier slaps your right cheek, you offer you left as well because then he'd have to slap you with the palm of his hand, and he couldn't do that without considering you an equal. You are undermining their law with love – not letting them walk all over you, but being subversively loving.

But Israel cannot even follow the eye for an eye rule. What hope is there of following Jesus' much harder alternative? Not much. Personally yes, we might be able to apply this. But politically, considering the situation faced today by terrified Palestinians who are facing the worst fears of an unjust invasion. How can you turn the other cheek when the rest of the world is turning a blind eye?

Three Blind mice.

Most of us know that we are innocent, and can sit on the sidelines and condemn Israel and so on, thinking that we are nothing like this. And yet, when you look at our personal lives – how do we respond when somebody hurts us. I mean really hurts us. How are we at being peacemakers in our relationships, and amongst those closest to us? Because the personal and the political are not that separable.

By focussing on the personal of course, it doesn't help those in Palestine who suffer today. So there are practical things that we might be moved to do here and now. To write to our MPs, to take part in the demonstrations. But Jesus was crucified because he did not bring the short term liberation that people wanted here and now. He changed people, who changed the world. But maybe he turns us into the kind of people who take action without thinking about it.

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Dear

My name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I have been horrified by reports about the Israeli use of disproportion violence upon the people of Palestine. As you know the people of Gaza are being bombarded by a devastating onslaught from Israeli F16s, tanks and warships.

Nearly 400 people have been killed in three days and while we deplore the firing of rockets from Gaza into Israel this can in no way justify the systematic slaughter being conducted by Israel on a captive unarmed civilian population.

This slaughter follows almost two years of blockade which has prevented essential supplies of food, fuel and medicines from reaching the Palestinian people in Gaza and causing untold suffering.

I believe that the people of Britain are horrified by the current situation and would like to ask that you request the Foreign Secretary, David Miliband, to say exactly what measures the government is taking to ensure an immediate end to the military attacks on Gaza and an immediate end to the siege as the first step in ensuring that international law is upheld in relation to the rights of the Palestinian people.

I would also like you to press the Foreign Secretary to take steps to ensure that the favourable status of Israel in the EU, including the EU trade agreement is removed immediately since it is a country which is violating international law and I do not wish my taxes to contribute to the economy of such a state.

Yours sincerely,