

Non-Violent Training Workshop:

Between the Bethlehem checkpoint and the Tel Aviv Airport

Date: December 6, 1998

- Duration: 8 hours
- Pre-requisite: Permit to travel through the airport
- Preparation: Be ready to answer any questions at the airport because the "new Israeli god of Security" is thirsty for responses to coercive questions.

Reflect on the following story (Take as much time as necessary):

I called a Service (shared taxi) to take me to the airport. We departed at 11:45 a.m. The Tantar-Bethlehem checkpoint I was able to cross with no difficulty after a 25 minutes long queue. The next cab that was going to take me to the airport was late however. I started becoming a little anxious. According to Israeli "airport etiquette," everyone traveling outside Israel has to check in at least three hours before the flight's departure. Mine was leaving at 4:30 p.m. To make the long story short, we left the checkpoint area around 1:00 p.m. and made it to the airport still in time. By this time my adrenaline level was well adjusted.

Our car was stopped at the entrance (!!). The security folk checked my luggage ... my patience. I tried to recall skills for tolerance, productive communication despite the anger I felt because of the harassment during the checking. Well, after all, I made it through, to the second wave of questioning and suspicious looks. I paid my fare to the cab driver. He wished me good luck.

The moment I gathered my luggage to put them on the trolley and go into the Departure Hall I heard, "*Sleikha Betakhon!*" Despite my broken Hebrew I understood it: "*Excuse me. Security!*" I felt like a VIP (Very Important Person) to be given all this attention. Why not? I am a Palestinian! As such, I am also "honored" by the principle "Everyone is guilty until proven innocent!"

"Where is your passport?" "Where do you travel?" "Why?" "What are you doing there?" ... Lucky me! My English teacher didn't train me except on wh... questions. For a moment I thought the security guy would ask me about my ideas regarding the Wye River Memorandum. I thought WYE belonged to the family of such wh... questions. In any case, his questions strongly resonated with ideas formulated at Wye River plantation.

The Palestinian side will apprehend the specific individuals suspected of penetrating acts of violence and terror for the purpose of further investigation, and prosecution and punishment of all persons

involved in acts of violence and terror (WYE River Memorandum, II A 1 d).

It seems that being guilty and being Palestinian are the two sides of the same coin.

Finally I made it to Area D of the airport without much delay and with an escort. *"Do you speak Hebrew?"* the person in the next window asked. *"English or Arabic please,"* I responded. *"Go there!"* I was oriented to another line where I waited almost one and a half hours for my turn. I was the last person in line to be taken aside. *"Good afternoon sir! We are from the Security. You understand?"* I said, *"It is obvious! I know all the smart answers to your questions."* It was already 3:45 p.m. *"Where are you going?"* *"Harare."* *"Why?"* *"To attend the WCC conference, and take part in the program 'How to Overcome Violence'."* *"Yes!? Why through Frankfurt?"* *"Because there is no other option today."* *"Do you have a visa?"* I showed the documents I had. *"Everything is fine. What are you going to talk about?"* *"Excuse me! This has nothing to do with security!"* *"Do you have your presentation?"* *"Yes and No! I have lots of papers and articles published. It is on the Web if you are interested."* I handed her my business card after she asked for one. *"Well, how did you get to the airport?"* *"By car, from Bethlehem."* *"Who packed your bag?"* *"I did."* *"Did you leave it unattended since then?"* *"No, I didn't."* *"Did anyone give you anything..."* *"No, none."* *"Do you carry any weapons?"* *"No, I don't believe in violence, but I have weapons of justice, reconciliation, peace..."* ...Smiling face... *"You know Sir, I am just doing my duty."*

I understand that part, but I cannot understand any question not related to security. We can talk about security when good neighbors make good fences, not when good fences make good neighbors. You know I have been traveling from this airport at least thirty times in the last four years. Questions are always the same. Harassment is the name of the game. I said to myself, "Be more creative. Enough is enough!"

She took my passport and ticket and asked for my "tasrih" (permit). I handed it to her. After consulting with other four members of the Security, she came back. *"Would you follow me Sir?"* In the heat of the moment I replied, *"Where is the red carpet? Listen! We have only 30 minutes till the plane leaves. Let us hurry!"* So we walked from the East wing of the airport to the West wing of the airport. What kind of peace is this, I wondered. *"I tell you, I'll lose my plane. Let us rush!"* As we were walking toward the other side I told her a story about peace.

--One day the jackal approached the hen that was sitting on the top of a sack of wheat. He admired the hen, and thought of how sweet it would taste, but couldn't reach her.

So he said to her, *"Did you hear Mother of mine, that the great chiefs of the animals declared peace on the whole earth? You can come down safely from up there and we can talk about the matter nicely."*

"Great peace you mean," pondered the hen while looking into the far distance.

"What are you looking at?" asked the jackal a little annoyed.

"Oh, just a pack of dogs running toward us." *"Do-ogs! Oh Mother of mine, I have some urgent business to take care of. I need to go now."* The hen started laughing, *"Do you not remember the Big Peace? Why do you run away?"* *"I don't think those dogs were at the meeting!"* replied the jackal and he whirled away.--

In the mean time the security officer started searching one of my bags, took it for X-ray...then the second one... "What is in it?"...She continued searching. *"Sorry Sir! I am doing my job."* "Listen! This is dangerous! I read things about nazi Germany. Yes! You can carry on with your responsibility with a smile! I am concerned for the security of all. It is the same 'Never Again not only for Jews, but for all!' Let us be inclusive in our approaches!"

By this time we were back at the Lufthansa counter. *"Sir, you cannot travel. You don't have the adequate papers. No visa...no real documents...no...no..."* I said, "Listen! Why didn't you tell me earlier?" That was it! I left the Departure Hall to go home via Arrival Hall... *"Hello! Betikhon! Passport!"* a voice stopped me. I said, "Listen! I spent four hours with the Security at the Lufthansa counter. Look at the colorful decorations on my bags! Isn't that enough?" *"Your passport, please!"* "I cannot give it to you..." *"Whose luggage is this?"* Finally I gave him my passport. He said, *"Would you follow me Sir?"* I refused and asked for his supervisor. The supervisor came. I started explaining the situation all over again. "I am going home to Bethlehem. I lost my flight. I have been checked thoroughly. It was enough. I don't want to go through all that again."

I left the airport around 7:30 p.m. and arrived home at 10:00 p.m. My kids and wife were happy to see me return.

Assignment:

- Divide in small groups.
Try to place yourself in the story.
What feelings does the experience instigate in you?
- What happens when victims become victimizers?
What do we learn from history?
- What should be the proper response to the presented situation?
Give examples for peaceful resolution of such conflicts.
- Examine the consequences of power inequality.
Do you find any similarities between your situation and the studied case?