

Avigail Abarbanel - No Healing without Equality

Having read [Who's to Blame for the Pain](#) on this blog, my beloved friend Avigail had these thoughts to share with me, and I think they are a very suitable commentary to the piece.

Healing is not possible without equality

I completely agree with the analogy of child abuse and find it very appropriate in this context. **I have been aware of many attempts by well-meaning people and organisations inside and outside Israel to initiate 'dialogue' or a process of 'reconciliation' between Israelis and Palestinians. As a psychotherapist and a former Israeli I am deeply suspicious of such attempts.** Although I do appreciate the good intentions behind them, I believe that they are grossly misguided and unfortunately, support the problem rather than the solution.

From the fields of family and relationship therapy we know that **true dialogue and reconciliation are only possible between two equal parties.** Where there is a clear imbalance of power any attempt at dialogue risks deepening the trauma of the wounded party and strengthening the position of the more powerful abuser. In cases of domestic violence for instance, in Australia we always offer separate therapy to the partners involved. Only after the two have been through a process that makes them feel truly equal to each other, some kind of dialogue or negotiation may be possible. **When well-meaning people talk about dialogue between Israelis and Palestinians they are operating under the wrong assumption that these are two equal parties who just seem to have some kind of a disagreement that can be handled with a bit of good will and conflict resolution skills. As if it is just a difference of culture, beliefs or of perception. While Palestinians are an occupied people living at the whim of Israel and under its complete control, this assumption has little to do with reality.** It is like trying to initiate reconciliation between a jailer and a detainee while the detainee is still behind bars, or between a wife and a violent husband while he is still bashing her up every day, between an individual employee in the Third World or anywhere and a multinational, or indeed between a child and an adult abuser. What is wrong with all these cases is the imbalance of power and the fact that the more powerful party has abused his power in some way, and is refusing to own up. **Abusers usually try to portray themselves as the victim.** It is not uncommon for a child molester to sit with a therapist and say how miserable they are and that they really have suffered, or for a violent man to behave as if he is the victim in the relationship! **Abusers often do not even understand what is wrong with their behaviour, they don't want to or cannot empathise with the pain and trauma they are inflicting and are seeing their victim as if he or she is somehow responsible for their own pain; even worse they behave as if they are justified in what they are doing because they have suffered in the past or because somehow it is their god given right.** We, therapists, don't buy into it. When someone has abused their power it changes the rules. Abusers can no longer ask to be treated with understanding of their own wounds or pain until they are absolutely committed to changing their ways and own up to their behaviour and their abuse of their power. **Israel has done what all abusers do, and everyone still seems to buy into it and allows them to get away with it.**

Rules that apply to situations where parties are equal are very different to situations where parties are not. This has to be cleared once and for all in relation to Palestine/Israel. There is no confusion and it is not very complicated. But there is a lot of spin out there usually generated by the more powerful side (Israel itself, pro-Zionist lobby etc). **Abusers such as Israel often try to use the 'negotiation', 'dialogue' or 'reconciliation' process to deepen their control, to help blur the truth and to justify their own position.** In relation to this conflict the efforts must be directed at eliminating the imbalance of power, that is to strip away Israel's power over the Palestinian people (i.e. end the occupation and Israel's control and stop allowing Israel to have control over the parameters of discussions and negotiations), and to help the

Palestinians become an empowered people. **Ideally that must involve some kind of recognition by Israel of its history and the injustice that Zionism perpetrated against the Palestinians. While the Palestinian people are still in the position of a 'battered wife' they have nothing and no one to negotiate with. Asking them to do it is not only a sham but deepens their abuse.** One only has to look at the history of the 'peace process' between Israel and the Palestinians to see many example of this point. It never worked because the process has been between two grossly unequal parties and therefore a complete farce.

<http://peacepalestine.blogspot.com/2005/08/avigail-abarbanel-no-healing-without.html>