

PM: Believing in the Power of Love

By Polly Mann

I heard Fr. Elias Chacour, speak in the Twin Cities in 1984. He was one of the most moving speakers I have ever heard and yet his message was quite simple.

Elias Chacour, who describes himself as Palestinian-Arab-Christian, is a firm believer in the non-violent message of Jesus. It had been as ever-present in his home as the bread on the table. His father prayed for the Israeli soldiers who drove the family of mother, father and six sons from their modest home. Nor did Elias, himself, speak ill of the Israeli government that has usurped so much Palestinian land and wounded and killed so many Palestinians.

Today, it is inspiring to know of the courageous nonviolent resistance of Palestinian Mazin Qumsiyeh whose motto is "Stay human!" (popular-resistance.blogspot.com).

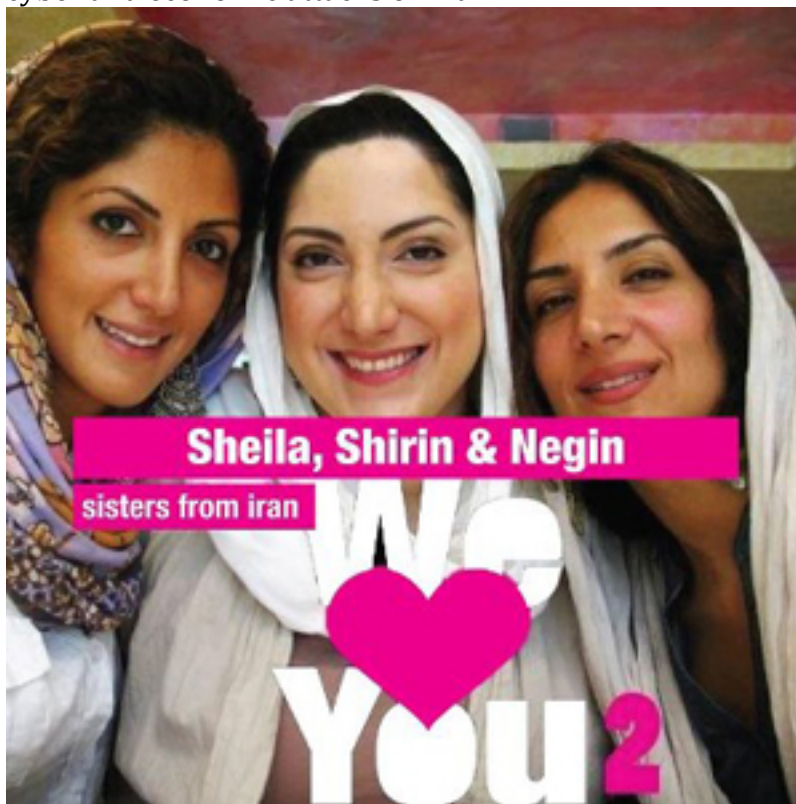


I am reminded that there have been and are Israelis, as well as Palestinians who hold similar beliefs. Several years ago Israeli Rabbi Arik Asherman spoke at Temple Israel in Minneapolis about his work with Rabbis for Human Rights, which is based on interfaith understanding and included the whole issue of Palestinian home demolitions. He has run into trouble with the Israeli government but his work continues. Also concerned about Palestinian rights is peace activist Uri Avnery, an Israeli writer and founder of the Gush Shalom peace movement. And then there are the Israeli military men and women called "Refusniks" who won't serve in the Occupied Territories.

New creative movements continue to spring up to prove that recognition of our common humanity can challenge the fear and hatred that are generated for power and profit. While it is difficult for Iranians and Israelis to communicate with each other--there is not even phone service between the two countries--Ronny Edry and

Michal Tamir, a married couple who are graphic designers, teachers and parents accidentally created an online movement by posting a Facebook image declaring “Iranians, we will never bomb your country. We love you!” Within 24 hours, messages began pouring in from Iran, “We love you, too!” and mutual love between people of both countries who did not even know each other sprang up to inspire the Peace Factory with a vision to expand peace to the entire Middle East.

It was perhaps predictable that they would be denounced as naïve and simplistic, as people who want peace inevitably are. It’s hard to break through the walls that power, supported by a military machine, have been built in national psyches. But it wasn’t long before people from other countries joined the project, including people from the U.S., which funds and supports Israel’s military and weapons, and conducts cyber and economic attacks on Iran.



In Afghanistan, the Afghan Peace Volunteers asked for two million friends to join them around the world with the dual purposes of memorializing the two million Afghans who had died since the wars began and ending the present war in Afghanistan. You may see people on U.S. streets wearing beautiful aqua-blue scarves, a project they initiated, to symbolize that people everywhere share our common humanity under the blue sky.

The Iraq American Reconciliation Project in the U.S. is a partner with the Muslim Peacemakers in Iraq and has held several delegations of visitors, art and water projects to create healing and friendships between the two countries in people-to-

people exchanges, principally between the Sister Cities of Najaf, Iraq, and Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA.

People exist who reach beyond their own lives to spread love to others, even those they have never met. This proves that peace really is possible. More people simply need to join in.

Polly Mann is a co-founder of Women Against Military Madness and a regular contributor and columnist for the WAMM newsletter. She continues to be active with the organization.