

A Lesson in Nonviolence at the Gates of Jerusalem

by Yusef Daher

On Tuesday morning, the sixteenth of March 2010, after kissing my newly born daughter, I went to my work in the Old City watching the helicopters circling over besieged Jerusalem, police and border police everywhere and at all doors of Occupied Jerusalem. What happened to me this morning, after kissing my loved ones and heading to enter Jerusalem? It was as if I was entering it for the first time. I was faced by soldiers and policemen some of whom have been there for the past three days, fearing escalation in the condemning acts from the locals against practices of religious intransigence to allow Jews to build within the city and next to other holy sites, to achieve their plans of Judaizing the city.

Yes?

How old are you and where do you live?

I live in Jerusalem, Beit Hanina and I am forty-three.

You cannot pass.

But I work here.

It is prohibited.

I work in the Church.

Forbidden, You do not understand? Only who is over fifty is allowed to enter.

Here I see two American Jewish women passing through!!! One foreigner and some Fathers and nuns entering the New Gate.

Do not stop here. Go there.

Why? I am standing on the sidewalk.

It is forbidden. Stay away from here.

In the meantime, I get a phone call on my mobile from the office and one of the Franciscan fathers, a dear friend, came and asked them to let me pass.

No, No way.

Other people told I can easily pass if I travel through Jaffa Gate.

I stood there, exactly where the soldier ordered me. The dear Father asked me to go from Jaffa Gate. I said, "No. I will not go from here. I came to my work and will cross from the New Gate, this gate where I cross everyday no matter what it takes. I will not obey their orders because they will just make greater restrictions and limitations each time. I know them very well by now, they want the city exclusively for them and will not share it with the others. They are mighty by their weapons but we are stronger by our faith. No. I will not go from here."

It is now 10:30 and I am still standing there, staring right into their eyes. Twenty of them with forty eyes. Some of them wearing sunglasses. Some are Russian immigrants and among them were Oriental Jews. One or two are Bedouins, some are Ethiopians and three Policewomen who know exactly how to behave! Oh my God an Indian too? What a combination. Where do they come from?

Here another man, an employee of the Church carrying parcels from the post office.

Forbidden

Loud shouts exchanged and one of the catholic priests came but to no avail, He carried the parcels himself and went back in. As for my friend, because he is a Jerusalemite, Palestinian Arab Christian like the Muslim, he is forbidden. Passing by also, a great friend, the former Palestinian Ambassador in Britain, the Vatican and Russia,

Mr. Afif Safieh. He understood the situation the moment he saw me standing there: “How much I would love to stand now in solidarity with you Yusef. But my sister has been waiting for me inside for some time and I have a foreign passport and I am over 50. I know you will succeed in the end. See you later Yusef.”

One of the soldiers came to me:

Go home. You will not pass through this Gate. Why wait?

I am waiting for the Lord. Yes, waiting for His mercy and salvation. I work there, inside but I can work here too outside. I cannot leave.

A few minutes later their officer comes with a Bedouin soldier to translate for me since I do not speak their language and did not learn it. He came to me with the Bedouin to check my identification maybe, and to tell me:

It is Forbidden (in Arabic). Go away from here. Don't stand here.

But I am standing on the sidewalk. Is he afraid from me?

No, no, no. The officer is not afraid of you.

Good.

My eyes in their eyes, all twenty of them. Their faces started to change with time. Now, every five minutes someone comes to me and says:

I want to help you, but the orders will not let you pass from here. You have been standing here for over an hour now. What's next???

Don't worry about me. I have work to do either inside or here. I am waiting for my Lord.

Never mind.

They started turning their backs towards me, looking at me from the side of their eyes. Yes they became shy!!! I feel that my looks have left in them something of an awakening. They are in trouble now!!! How will they deal with this matter, with this man who is carrying his laptop, in his navy blue suit and gray hair covering his head and his eyes directed at us??? What's next? They are asking each other about me now, wondering, “What is his story?”

My story is that I am here and will not leave my city. I will not raise my voice or my hand, but I'm here to stay and will not leave. The truth and righteousness are reflected in my eyes, asking them: “Where are you from? What are you doing here? Who gave you the right to close the doors of the Kingdom of the God before his sons?” This is my story.

They were saved at last in a second. Here comes another commander from inside to intervene and let the man who had the parcels pass, he must have been contacted by the Patriarchate. This is their chance. One of them approaches me quickly and says,

Come, come with me. Pass now and don't worry.

Did I win today? What did I achieve? I think that what looked like two hours of strong feelings and different thoughts and the battle of looks was a lesson I will never forget. Yes, but Jerusalem today is still boiling, from the smallest refugee camp to the large mosque yard. The people can no longer tolerate the situation.. and each one of us has his own way in dealing with this injustice.

The same way I kissed my beloved this morning, I kissed Jerusalem and She kissed me back through a lesson I will never forget.