



# The power to build peace

**ZIONISM HAS** succeeded. The Jewish people has a sovereign nation-state, a full member of the family of nations, characterized by remarkable economic, technological, cultural, diplomatic, and military power. The Jews have emerged from powerlessness. And yet, ironically, the dominant theme in Jewish public discourse about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict seems to be powerlessness. We have no partner, no options, no choice, no power to change the status quo. The matter is out of our hands, so we will just have to hunker down, keep our powder dry, and wait for some *deus ex machina* who will convert the Palestinians into Zionists or make them disappear. An apocalyptic scenario is playing out, in which the Palestinians are the current manifestation of Amalek, just a cog in the eternal mechanism of “all the world wants the Jews dead.” Diplomatic solutions are off the table; indeed, there is no table. Meanwhile, we, as victims of Palestinian rejectionism and terror, occupy the high moral ground.

But is this perception true? Are we really powerless? Could it be that our claim to be powerless is merely a means of escaping responsibility, a cop-out from facing difficult choices?

In his new book, *Profiles in Peace*, Ron Kronish presents six case studies of individuals in our time who reject this claim, and who live and teach and act out of a sense that, as Levinas taught, despair is a sin – that we do, as individuals and nations, have power, the freedom to act, and dare not sit around and wait for the apocalypse. In these troubling times, Kronish’s peacebuilders are points of light in the darkness – beacons showing us the way.

In an extensive introduction, Kronish surveys the history of the conflict since 1948, summarized by a timeline of wars and peace agreements. And he discusses the distinction between peacemaking and peacebuilding, upon which the book is based: peacemaking is done by national leaders and diplomats, and finds expression in national actions: declarations and agreements. Peacebuilding refers primarily to the work of civil society, the efforts to influence



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Rabbi Ron Kronish

“hearts and minds,” to lower the barriers of fear and resentment, to foster dialogue and mutual understanding. Which is dependent on which is an interesting question. Must hearts be softened before treaties can be signed? Or must there be a formal process of mutual recognition and rejection of violence in order for processes of reconciliation and dialogue to flourish? Ron Kronish suggests that these two processes operate in tandem, but that our path to influence as ordinary citizens (not ministers and diplomats) is primarily in peacebuilding.

Kronish has devoted his career to peacebuilding, and his profiles of six colleagues in the field are informative and inspiring, demonstrating that the decision to surrender to the siren song of powerlessness is just that – a decision. These six heroes have made a free and conscious decision to plug their ears to the temptations of victimhood, and to sail on toward a vision of a better future, of peace. It has not been an easy journey for any of them, but their activism and optimism show clearly that we do have choices; we only have to make them.

Kronish has chosen three Jewish Israeli and three Palestinian peacebuilders. He has worked with each of them in various con-

texts and projects, has interviewed them and read their writings. He provides a brief biography of each, with special emphasis on the ideological grounding of their activism – and on the experiences that led them to make the choices they have made, the choice to stand against the current, to reject powerlessness, to take responsibility.

For four of the six – two Palestinians and two Israeli Jews – it was their own deeply felt religious identity and tradition that led them to peacebuilding activism. So it seems that while religion may be a driver of the conflict, it also can serve as a force for peace.

For Huda Abuarquob, whose experience growing up in the West Bank in the 70s formed her perception of Israelis as oppressors, the 1993 Oslo Accords were a life-changing event, and as a teacher for the Palestinian Authority she was caught up in the euphoria of the 90s, when the hope for reconciliation and Palestinian self-determination was palpable. Through participation in seminars and training abroad, she developed a nuanced understanding of the conflict and tools for addressing it. And thus, as the euphoria faded into stalemate, she has continued and expanded her work with peacebuilding NGOs, influencing, along the way, thousands of young people.

Prof. Mohammed Dajani Daoudi, scion of a prominent Palestinian family in Jerusalem, similarly imbibed fear and resentment towards Israel and Israelis from his life experiences after 1967. For him the turning point was personal: seeing the way Israeli medical professionals treated his cancer-stricken father caused him to rethink his views and to move towards a life dedicated to fostering such re-thinking. Most famously, he led a group of Palestinian students on a visit to Auschwitz. And seeking support in his own tradition, he has developed a moderate interpretation of Islam, *Wasatia* – “the middle way.”

It seems that Lutheran Bishop Munib Younan did not experience a single “tipping point,” but rather found his way to a life dedicated to reconciliation through an extensive period of study, as a young man, in



subjects, a participant and often initiator of the programs he describes. He has been indefatigable in leading, fundraising, facilitating, writing, speaking, and organizing on behalf of peacebuilding projects and activities. This book is not only a study and analysis – it is in a way a reflection on the author’s own personal experience of the frustrations, rewards, and hopes of peacebuilding.

Kronish titles the concluding section of the book, “Is Peace Possible?” But having read this far, we already know the answer: Yes, but it’s really up to us. ■

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**Profiles in Peace:  
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the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict**  
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Finland. Studying theology and at the same time contemplating the content of his Palestinian and Christian identity, he had the opportunity to develop his own theological approach to nationalism and to the conflict; upon his return,

Younan became a leader in various reconciliation efforts and projects, even before Oslo.

Rabbi Michael Melchior also found his way to peacebuilding through religious study; heir to a long tradition of Scandinavian rabbinical leadership, interreligious dialogue was part of his family’s culture. And as a student in Jerusalem in the 70s, he was drawn to the Jewish peace movement rooted in the ideological traditions of the Orthodox kibbutz. Not just a voice in the wilderness, Rabbi Melchior has served as a member of the Knesset and government minister. He has been consistent and very productive in initiating and supporting programs of dialogue and reconciliation.

Prof. Galia Golan, as a young new immigrant from the United States at the time of the 1967 war, was troubled from the very beginning by the conflict between the messianic drive to settle the West Bank and considerations of rights, democracy, and peace. For her, a turning point came with Anwar Sadat’s visit to Jerusalem in 1977, which galvanized peace activism in Israel; she was among the founders of Israel’s prime activist peace organization, Peace Now, a year later. After decades of leadership, disappointed by Peace Now’s movement towards a “both sides-ist” approach, Golan became active in a joint Israeli-Palestinian NGO, “Combatants for Peace.” But throughout,

she has been an articulate public spokesman for both peacebuilding and peacemaking.

Kronish’s sixth case study is of Hadassah Froman, ironically, it might seem, a founding member of the West Bank settlement Tekoa. Froman (following the lead of her late husband Rabbi Menachem Froman) believes that settlement is not ipso facto an obstacle to peace, and that Israeli Jews and Palestinians can live together in peace throughout the land. From the earliest years of life in Tekoa, their family actively expounded and modeled an ideology of shared land, mutual respect, and equal rights. Hadassah Froman continues this tradition with support and leadership of NGO’s furthering this belief.

While the work of these peacebuilders over the years has had widespread influence, somehow the media tend to pass over it.

Reading Kronish’s profiles is a revelation: there is a whole world out there of Palestinians and Israelis, Muslims, Christians, and Jews, who have not despaired, who have rejected victimhood, who have set an example of taking responsibility for the reality in which we live. And they are not just soft-minded dinosaurs in an increasingly polarized discourse, as Kronish demonstrates by appending a chapter with brief profiles of peacebuilding activists in the next generation.

Beyond these younger peacebuilders, it becomes obvious as one reads through the book that another peacebuilder is speaking between the lines: Rabbi Ron Kronish himself. He can write his case studies because he was an active colleague of each of his