

HOPE

BY MAZIN QUMSIYEH¹

In August 2023, Professor Mazin Qumsiyeh, Founder and Volunteer Director of the Palestine Institute for Biodiversity and Sustainability and the Palestine Museum of Natural History at Bethlehem University visited the Boston area for 3½ days of meetings and presentations that addressed Israel's human rights inequality and related ecological consequences.

One event was a presentation to activists (in-person, streamed, and [archived](#)) at the Community Church of Boston. In the Q&A that followed, Shifra Freewoman asked Mazin two questions:

- (1) What is his source for hope considering how little progress has been made in effecting change?*
- (2) What can the American activists do to help West Bank Palestinians improve their lives?*

Here is a transcription of Mazin's response.

Well, Shifra asks two deep questions, and it may take me a while to respond to them. I'll see if I can be brief. She asks about hope, [what is] my source of Hope? And the second one is what should people do to get to [to the] stage where we are in a better state than what we are in now?

First of all, on the issue of Hope. You know from the dawn of human civilization, if you study history you find a lot of evil being done. A lot of wars. A lot of conflict. A lot of torture. It was actually much worse a thousand years ago than it is now.

Globally, we have become a little better civilized. I don't say [fully] civilized yet. It's still a work in progress for Humanity. There have always been negative things going on, but there have always been remarkably good things happening. Good people doing good things, helping each other, supporting each other.

You know one could be philosophical about it, and say like the Buddhists say—"the ying and the yang," you know—that this is natural to have negativity; that there's not going to be Heaven on Earth—there is always Heaven *and* Hell on earth; they're always together and that will always be the case.

The question is where are you going to stand? Are you going to stand on the side of those committing evil and harming other people, or are you going to stand on the side of people who help other people. So, you draw hope from the fact that there is a lot of positive energy in the face of negative energy around the world.

And it's remarkable when you look at it. For example, slavery. You know slavery was such a horrible thing, but there were people who helped—even white people who helped with smuggling slaves to the north, etc. So there are always people who are doing positive things, and we want to be part of those people.

I am not particularly keen on determining my activism based on the outcome of a particular situation. My activism is not based on calculations of outcome. And why do I say that? Because you know [that]

¹ Learn more about Mazin at <http://qumsiyeh.org/> and (optionally) add your name to his mailing list.

ultimately the way you live your life is more important than the destination. Who was it who said, “Peace is not a destination. Peace is the road”? The road they take is peace.”

So if you take the road that we took, that you took—many of you took this road [and] it's not an easy road by the way, you could become richer if you took the other road. You could have a more comfortable life and whatever, but it is a road that at least allows you to look yourself in the mirror and do the things that you believe in and say, “Hey I'm gonna get up in the morning.”

You know, today we got up early of course to get to the events. So Jessie and I have been sleeping very little because we have so much work to do. But it is a road that is satisfactory that makes us feel comfortable with ourselves, live better within our own skins.

That's what's important—not necessarily a destination, and I cannot guarantee the destination. I cannot guarantee that Palestine will be free, by the way. Palestine could end up like Native Americans, where they are left in [a] few reservations. So it is not the destination, it is the road that you take.

Now what is this road (which is the second question that you raise)? What should we do, what should each of us do? This I can't tell you. I can tell you what I do, and I showed you some of what I do because that's my background and my knowledge and my experience.

I [started] an Institute of Biodiversity and Sustainability because I got a PhD in biology, and I was talking about environmental challenges since I was in my early 20s. So that's my own background. If your background is—I don't know, [like] music—like Dean Stevens [who] enjoys playing the guitar, you do activism via music which he just did by singing a song. Somebody else may have [an] interest in lobbying and an interest in politicians, and they go after politicians. And all the power to them.

So everybody does activism in their own way. If you want suggestions for activism I can send you dozens of them, not one or two. In fact on my website <http://qumsiyeh.org/activistmanual/>, I have a list of 75 things that can be done. But I don't want you to do all 75. You know it's too much; I don't do all 75; I do three or four of them. So this is just a list of suggestions. But everybody does what they feel.

For example, if you're Jewish you might want to reach a Jewish community and because they are supporting Israel, you want to make sure that they are not supporting violence and oppression.

If you're a religious Christian you may want to reach [out] to the Christian Zionists and tell them, “Wait a minute!” How is supporting genocide and ethnic cleansing consistent with Christian values? It's illogical! Jesus said somebody hits you on the left cheek you turn the right cheek. How is this consistent with bombing refugee camps? It doesn't make sense.

So you reach out in the context that you feel comfortable with.