

Quaker Tent Solidarity

Jeff Kisling



First Nation-Farmer Climate Unity March, 2018 Photo: Jeff Kisling



Bear Creek Quaker Meeting Photo credit: Jeff Kisling

A vision came to me during meeting for worship recently. I was connected to the Bear Creek meetinghouse remotely via ZOOM. I was in Madison, Wisconsin, and the meetinghouse is in the countryside near Earlham, Iowa. We gather for about an hour, listening for a spiritual message. Sometimes one of us will discern such a message and share it by speaking into the silence. It is not unusual to have no spoken messages. But our spirits are still nurtured.

At the time I received this message, I was led to speak it into the silence of our meeting for worship. It is difficult to write about spiritual matters. We don't have good language to express these things. And in our secular society it often feels awkward to have conversations about spiritual matters. Organized religions have the potential to constrain spiritual beliefs and practices. That, or other reasons, can make our spirituality passive.

Whereas I believe a crucial part of spirituality involves seeking how to put our beliefs into practice. Quaker faith is dynamic. We believe we can receive spiritual guidance, and we are compelled to discern how to put that into practice. There is an historic tension related to activism which continues today. And often exist within us.

Our spiritual beliefs are often at odds with the status quo, which often encapsulates inequities and injustices. There are consequences to acting against established social or political norms or laws.

Quakers have a history and reputation of speaking and acting publicly against injustices, often despite personal risk.

It is hard to know how many Quakers have had significant spiritual experiences. Whether because of the inadequacy of language or a reluctance to share something so deeply personal, it is hard to know. I have been blessed to have had several such experiences.

This vision was an image of a tent. It was an orange two-person tent, just like the one I used on an eight-day walk of ninety-four miles, from Des Moines to Fort Dodge, Iowa, in 2018. Around thirty native and non-native people walked along the path of the Dakota Access pipeline, the First Nation-Farmer Climate Unity March.

The vision of the tent is about the Palestinian children and their families who are forced to live in makeshift tents because their homes have been destroyed by the Israeli bombardment, or demolished by Israeli bulldozers. The United States continues to be deeply complicit in the genocide because of military air and weapons sent to Israel.

I also spent time at and wrote about the student Palestinian solidarity encampment at the University of Wisconsin here in Madison.

The image of the tent is clear. But I don't see anything else. I don't know where the tent is located, or if there are other tents. Visions of require further discernment.

I believe the tent is on the Bear Creek meeting grounds. And I think the time is during the upcoming Midyear meeting of Quakers. The theme is "The Fierce Urgency of Now: Quaker Discernment and Action for a Just Peace in Israel/Palestine," led by Steve Chase.

I have questions and concerns about my vision. Is the time Midyear Meeting? How do I indicate this is for Palestinian support? Should I invite others to join the encampment. Does Bear Creek meeting share this concern? Do the Quakers of my yearly meeting, the larger body of Quakers, support this vision?

In today's toxic political and social environment, there is the possibility of significant negative reaction against this from the wider community. Relationships among Quakers living in the area and the wider community could suffer. Violence and property damage could result. The meetinghouse is in the countryside, with no one living close enough to look out for the building.

There might not be time before Midyear Meeting in a couple of weeks to use the opportunity to further the exchange of ideas and feelings about the Palestinian's plight with the wider community.

I am seeking further guidance about this vision, both from the Spirit and from Quakers. Maybe the time and/or location is not Midyear Meeting. It clearly involves a tent as symbolic of Palestinian solidarity. Somewhere, sometime.

Further Reflections

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It's scary to talk about spiritual visions. I don't hear much about visions these days. I sometimes get apprehensive about how this will play out in my Quaker communities, before remembering the Spirit will guide us.

This isn't the first vision I've had. The first was when I was around nine years old sitting in the sunshine during meeting for worship in the Bear Creek meetinghouse. That vision was not an image, like my current vision of a tent. It was of a pure light and feeling heat. And a certainty that the Spirit is real.

I've drawn on that vision many times:

- To resist the draft during the Vietnam War
- To join Friends Volunteer Mission in Indianapolis
- To change my career path to respiratory medicine
- To accept a position in a pediatric clinical research lab
- To resist fossil fuel pipelines
- To live without a car
- To join a Black youth mentoring community, Kheprw Institute
- To join Des Moines Mutual Aid
- To work with the Great Plains Action Society
- To be part of the Decolonial Repair Network
- To join the Wisconsin Coalition for Justice in Palestine

The current accelerating authoritarianism in this country is making any witness of Palestinian support very risky. Bear Creek meeting is concerned about potential risks of violence to the meetinghouse of meeting members. More likely might be strained personal relationships.

Why do I believe we should take on this witness? There are so many other wars and conflicts all over the world.

But the atrocities against Palestinian children are unconscionable and could only have happened with the billions of dollars of military aid and equipment to Israel from us. And for the diplomatic cover, such as vetoing United Nations resolutions for a ceasefire, multiple times.

We are deeply complicit in the horrors of this genocide and ethnic cleansing.

You can not understand this if you have not seen what Israel, and we, have done, and continue to do today. This isn't shown by the mainstream media. We can't even watch videos like the Academy Award winning documentary "No Other Land".

You can get some sense of what is happening in the videos below by Macklemore. They are age restricted because of language and the horrors that are shown. You can do your own research if you're not able to bring yourself to watch Macklemore's videos.

People will question whether tent solidarity will help the Palestinian people. From the time I've spent here in Madison engaged with multiple solidarity efforts, I know how much our solidarity efforts mean.

We were hopeful the latest ceasefire would hold, and could begin a path to peace. Instead, Israeli tanks and soldiers are escalating the violence and genocide.

Macklemore

Macklemore has released a series of videos to show what you don't see in the censored, mainstream media. The videos are very graphic and contain age-restricted language and visuals. They have been viewed millions of times.

All proceeds to UNRWA USA. Donate Here: <https://www.unrwausa.org/>

Hind's Hall

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fgDQyFeBBlo>

Hind's Hall 2

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bjtDsd0g468>

F** Up

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sn9EKC9nqU4>

Quaker Meeting in Solidarity with the Palestinian People

Expressions of Support and Advocacy

The act of setting up a tent at a Quaker meetinghouse in solidarity with the Palestinian people can convey a multitude of powerful messages. Rooted in the Quaker tradition of peace, justice, and equality, such a gesture serves as a symbol of support and a call to action for the broader community.

Solidarity and Support

One of the primary messages is one of solidarity. By setting up a tent, participants are physically and symbolically aligning themselves with the Palestinian people. This act demonstrates a shared commitment to their struggles and aspirations, signaling that they are not alone in their plight. It is an expression of empathy and a public declaration that their suffering and perseverance are acknowledged and supported by others.

Nonviolent Resistance

Quakers have a long history of advocating for nonviolent solutions to conflicts. The tent, as a nonviolent symbol, echoes this tradition. It underscores the belief that peaceful resistance and dialogue are essential in addressing and resolving conflicts. This message is particularly poignant in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, where violence has often overshadowed efforts for peace. The tent stands as a testament to the power of nonviolence and an appeal for both sides to seek peaceful pathways to coexistence.

Human Rights and Justice

Another key message is the emphasis on human rights and justice. Setting up a tent can draw attention to the human rights violations and injustices faced by Palestinians. It serves as a reminder of the importance of upholding international human rights standards and advocating for justice for all people, regardless of their nationality or ethnicity. This message aligns with the Quaker testimony of equality, which asserts that all people are of equal worth and deserving of fair treatment.

Raising Awareness

The act of setting up a tent can be a powerful tool for raising awareness. It can attract the attention of passersby, media, and the broader community, sparking conversations and increasing understanding about the Palestinian situation. Informational materials, discussions, and events held at the site can further educate and engage the public, fostering a more informed and compassionate community.

Community and Collaboration

Setting up a tent at a Quaker meetinghouse also conveys a message of community and collaboration. It reflects the Quaker value of community and the belief that collective action can bring about positive change. This action can serve as an invitation for others to join in solidarity and cooperation, promoting a sense of unity and shared purpose in the pursuit of justice and peace.

Hope and Resilience

The tent itself can be seen as a symbol of hope and resilience. Despite the challenges and adversities faced by the Palestinian people, the tent stands as a beacon of hope for a better future. It signifies the enduring human spirit and the belief that change is possible. This message of hope is crucial, as it inspires continued efforts and perseverance in the pursuit of peace and justice.

Interfaith and Cross-Cultural Solidarity

Given the diverse religious and cultural backgrounds of both the Quaker community and the Palestinian people, the tent can also symbolize interfaith and cross-cultural solidarity. It highlights the importance of building bridges across different faiths and cultures, fostering mutual respect and understanding. This message promotes a vision of a world where diverse communities can come together in support of common goals and values.

Highlighting Specific Issues

Setting up a tent can also draw attention to specific issues faced by the Palestinian people, such as displacement, restrictions on movement, and access to resources. By focusing on these issues, the action can bring them to the forefront of public consciousness and encourage discussions and actions aimed at addressing them.

Advocacy for Policy Change

Finally, the act of setting up a tent can serve as a form of advocacy for policy change. It can signal a call to action for governments, organizations, and individuals to take concrete steps towards supporting the Palestinian people and addressing the root causes of the conflict. This message can include advocating for diplomatic solutions, humanitarian aid, and policies that promote peace and justice.

In conclusion, setting up a tent at a Quaker meetinghouse in solidarity with the Palestinian people is a multifaceted gesture that conveys profound messages of support, nonviolence, human rights, awareness, community, hope, interfaith solidarity, specific issues, and advocacy for policy change. It is a powerful expression of the Quaker commitment to peace and justice, and a call to the broader community to join in these efforts.

Tent Solidarity with Palestine: A Study Guide

Study Guide: Tent Solidarity with Palestine at Quaker Meetinghouses

Quiz

1. What is the primary message conveyed by setting up a tent at a Quaker meetinghouse in solidarity with the Palestinian people?
2. How does the act of setting up a tent connect with the Quaker tradition and its core values?
3. Explain how the tent serves as a symbol of nonviolent resistance in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.
4. In what ways does setting up a tent aim to raise awareness about the Palestinian situation within the broader community?
5. How does the act of tent solidarity reflect the Quaker value of community and collaboration?
6. Beyond its symbolic value, what practical actions might accompany the presence of a solidarity tent?
7. What is the significance of the tent as a symbol of hope and resilience for the Palestinian people?
8. How does the tent initiative promote the idea of interfaith and cross-cultural solidarity?
9. Give two examples of specific issues faced by Palestinians that the tent action might highlight.
10. How can setting up a tent be understood as a form of advocacy for policy change related to the Palestinian issue?

Quiz Answer Key

1. The primary message conveyed is one of solidarity and support for the Palestinian people, demonstrating a shared commitment to their struggles and aspirations and signaling that they are not alone in their plight.
2. The act aligns with the Quaker tradition of peace, justice, and equality, serving as a vivid and nonviolent symbol rooted in these core values to advocate for the Palestinian people.
3. The tent, as a nonviolent symbol, echoes the Quaker history of advocating for peaceful solutions, underscoring the belief that dialogue and nonviolent resistance are essential in resolving conflicts like the Israeli-Palestinian one.
4. Setting up a tent attracts attention from the public and media, sparking conversations and increasing understanding about the Palestinian situation through its visual presence and potential informational materials and discussions.
5. This action reflects the Quaker value of community and the belief in collective action for positive change, inviting others to join in solidarity and cooperation to pursue justice and peace for the Palestinian people.
6. Beyond symbolism, the tent can be a site for distributing informational materials, hosting discussions and educational events, and organizing advocacy efforts related to the Palestinian issue.
7. Despite the challenges faced by Palestinians, the tent stands as a visual representation of hope for a better future and signifies the enduring human spirit and the belief that positive change is achievable.
8. Given the diverse backgrounds of Quakers and Palestinians, the tent symbolizes building bridges across faiths and cultures, fostering mutual respect, understanding, and collective support for shared values.
9. Examples include highlighting displacement of Palestinians, restrictions on their movement, or limited access to essential resources, bringing these specific hardships to public attention.
10. By its visible presence and associated activities, the tent action serves as a call to action for governments, organizations, and individuals to take concrete steps, such as diplomatic solutions or humanitarian aid, to support Palestinians and address the root causes of the conflict.

Essay Format Questions

1. Analyze the effectiveness of setting up a tent at a Quaker meetinghouse as a form of nonviolent communication and advocacy in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Consider the strengths and limitations of this approach in raising awareness and promoting policy change.
2. Discuss the significance of Quaker values, such as peace, justice, equality, and community, in motivating and shaping the act of setting up a solidarity tent for the Palestinian people. How do these values inform the messages conveyed by this action?
3. Explore the various messages conveyed by the act of setting up a tent in solidarity with Palestinians, explaining how each message (e.g., solidarity, nonviolence, human rights, hope) contributes to the overall impact and meaning of the action.
4. Evaluate the potential of interfaith and cross-cultural solidarity, as symbolized by the tent action, to foster understanding and cooperation in addressing complex global issues like the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. What role can such symbolic acts play in building bridges between diverse communities?
5. Consider the long-term implications and potential for sustained engagement resulting from a tent solidarity action. How can this initial symbolic act lead to further education, advocacy, and meaningful contributions towards a resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict?

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Solidarity:** Unity or agreement of feeling or action, especially among individuals with a common interest; mutual support within a group.
- **Nonviolent Resistance:** The practice of achieving socio-political goals through symbolic protests, civil disobedience, economic or political noncooperation, and other methods, without using violence.
- **Human Rights:** Rights inherent to all human beings, regardless of race, sex, nationality, ethnicity, language, religion, or any other status. These rights are universal, inalienable, and indivisible.
- **Justice:** The upholding of what is just, fair, and right. It often involves the fair treatment of individuals and the redress of wrongs.
- **Awareness:** Knowledge or perception of a situation or fact. In this context, it refers to increasing public understanding of the Palestinian situation.
- **Community:** A group of people living in the same place or having a particular characteristic in common; a feeling of fellowship with others, as a result of sharing common attitudes, interests, and goals.
- **Collaboration:** The action of working with someone to produce or create something; joint effort.
- **Hope:** A feeling of expectation and desire for a certain thing to happen; a reason for this feeling.
- **Resilience:** The capacity to recover quickly from difficulties; toughness. In this context, it refers to the enduring spirit of the Palestinian people.
- **Interfaith Solidarity:** Unity and mutual support among people of different religious faiths, often working together towards a common goal.
- **Cross-Cultural Solidarity:** Unity and mutual support among people from different cultural backgrounds, often working together towards a common goal.
- **Advocacy:** Public support for or recommendation of a particular cause or policy.
- **Policy Change:** Alterations or modifications to existing laws, regulations, rules, or courses of action adopted by a government, organization, or institution.
- **Quaker:** A member of the Religious Society of Friends, a Christian denomination emphasizing direct experience of God, pacifism, social justice, and equality.
- **Meetinghouse:** The place of worship for Quakers.
- **Palestinian People:** An Arab ethnonational group descended from people who have historically inhabited the region of Palestine.
- **Israeli-Palestinian Conflict:** An ongoing dispute between Israelis and Palestinians over land and self-determination.

"Every bombed village is my hometown"
- *James Baldwin*

And every dead child is my child.
Every grieving mother is my mother.
Every crying father is my father.
Every home turned to rubble
is the home I grew up in.
Every brother carrying the remains
of his brother across borders
is my brother.
Every sister waiting for a sister
who will never come home
is my sister.

Every one of these people are ours,
Just like we are theirs.
We belong to them
and they belong to us.

Days after they arrived at Tal al-Sultan camp,
Israel bombed it, killing 45 Palestinians in
what became known as the "**tent
massacre.**"

Many were burned alive in their tents.

"All the children started screaming... The
sound was terrifying."
Umm Mohamed Al-Attar

