

Tribute to Paul Kessler

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My childhood in Palestine under British mandate was marked by loneliness. I was the only child of working class parents that worked from dawn to sunset. At these times the workers' children did not have toys. I was lucky as my grandfather taught me to read when I was 3 years old. But at home we didn't have any children books therefore I was reading the workers party newspaper (Davar) and those big heavy tomes of the adults' books Ha'tkufa (the Era in Hebrew), and eventually some others.

I didn't understand much from these readings and it wasn't fun. Therefore I escaped to imagination games in which the star was my imagined "older brother" who was an astonishing boy. He was kind and gentle, always available to assist and support; he was not very talkative and used to have a generous little smile on his face.

We spent a great deal of time together, my big brother and I.

I'm not sure how, but I knew something about what was going on in Europe at these times of the 1940s'.

In my imagination games, we, my brother and I, found shelter in Europe's forests, we collected seeds and fruits in order to survive, we sneaked in farmers houses at the edges of the woods, we succeeded to run away from German soldiers and we formed a group of kids that fought the Nazis. We had together hell of adventures in those deep dark European woods.

Time passed and the terrifying WWII ended. My father took me to Jerusalem's town center where Brits and Jews celebrated the Victory, the end of the war. Daddy who was a silent man declared: "we won over the Nazis". "I know" I've answered. Of course I did not tell him what we, my big brother and I, did during that war.

Life continued, I went to school and played with my classmate girls. My big brother's place slowly reduced but didn't vanish. I could always get back to him and to his encouraging little smile.

Then I went to the university with its bands, friends, feminist and political struggles that filled my existence.

I almost completely forgot my older brother.

One day, in a total surprise, my big brother's image appeared like a lightning strike. I immediately recognized that very particular smile of the stranger Frenchman that I met through my political activity with the Physician for Human rights; an organization that I founded in Israel at the late 1980's. My big Brother have changed a lot with the years, only due to that particular smile I could recognize him.

The Frenchman's name was Paul. Paul Kessler from Paris.

As we were used to in the past, I was the one who talked and he, as usual, most of the time listened. I regularly wrote him letters concerning the current situation in Palestine-Israel and sometime even about myself.

Like in our childhood we were involved in many similar activities:

The situation of the Palestinian prisoners arrested by the Israeli occupation forces during the first Intifada, the struggle against the solitary confinement of Mordechai Vaanunu designated by the authorities as the "Nuclear Spy"; the attempts to release Professor Marek Klingberg from prison, another Jewish spy that was suspected in delivering information concerning Israel biological and chemical weapons to the USSR. But above all we were comrades and partners in our long struggle against the "moderate physical pressure", which is the Israeli euphemism for torture policy. Indeed, I was among the founders of the Israeli committee against torture.

As my big brother and I had a childhood experience in fighting domination and injustices we were tied by our repulsion from monstrous power. On October 21st 1996 I've wrote him:

Dear Paul

It's a long time since we've met, and I am sorry for this.

I attended the International Conference on Democracy, Human Rights & Mordecai Vanunu, which took place in Tel Aviv on 14-15 October. The conference marked the regretful fact that Vanunu is now entering his 11th year in solitary confinement. It was an important event, and I hope some momentum from the conference will carry the campaign for his release forward.

Since regretfully you were not at this conference, I am writing you what I would have told you.

Paul and I believed that Vaanunu deserved high respect. We saw him as a kind of a hero, a single man against a huge and powerful apparatus. Paul believed that power should be resisted, he consider it as a sin and as a source of

inhumanity. For him it was true during the Nazi era as it is facing any kind of ruling power crushing humans.

Paul was a Jew, like myself, though his Jewishness didn't blind him when it comes to consider the Israeli power used against the Palestinian in various different ways like: lands expropriations, arbitrary imprisonments, house demolitions, denying freedom of movement and above all torture or state force deployed against its own citizens such as Klingberg or Vaanunu.

With Paul we shared the idea that actions which might dismantle even partly the excessive power of a state is by essence just and should be done. This is why the courageous revelation by Mordechai Vaanunu of Israel's nuclear arsenal deserved to be acknowledged and honored. It meant actually to express solidarity and to offer him support and assistance. This was also our position in the case of Professor Marek Klingberg that defended the idea that the United State's power should be limited through the revelation of Israel's biological and chemical armament's plans in order to break America's monopoly in this domain. Klingberg's acts were just and courageous and as such we should do whatever we can in order to help him to be freed from his long imprisonment.

Paul wrote, talked and mobilized scientists from France and the world in order to sign petitions in favor of the liberation from jail both Klingberg and Vaanunu. The petitions and letters were addressed to the Israeli President, Prime Minister and the Minister of Justice. We knew that without these letters and petitions the World and Israel could ignore these righteous men and that the long years of imprisonment of each one of them will sign their oblivion and obliterate their existences.

As much as we could, Paul and I worked hard in order to assure that the world and Israel won't be able to wipe out Vaanunu and Klingberg.

In 1988, the year that the first Palestinian Intifada started, Paul came for a visit. We have traveled together to see the Israeli security tents prison in the Negev desert, named by the Palestinian inmates 'Aansar 3'.

This first visit announced the many visits to follow.

With my big brother Paul we discovered that there was no medical follow-up available for the Palestinian prisoners in KZIOT/Ansar 3 prison. No clinic space, no physician, just nothing. Paul promised to inform some VIP's in France. Him with his contacts and us, PHR, through our pressing demands, we

finally achieved a clinic space in the prison and regular physician visits. This process was time consuming and laborious.

This is the every day weapon of the ruling power, the use of security-bureaucratic arguments and tools in order to exasperate and depress its opponents if not actually eliminate them. This is indeed the activists' daily reality in the struggle against Israel's colonization, occupation and apartheid policies.

After the six years old Palestinian girl Lulu Abu-Dachi was shot in her head by Israeli soldiers, I've addressed Paul:

I am sure you remember our conversation in Tel Aviv about six years ago, concerning a little girl, Lulu Abu Dachi. Lulu, who sustained a gunshot wound to her head at six years old, has been in our minds all these years. PHR - Israel has been handling her medical and judicial struggles from the outset. Recently we've secured a court decision that obligates the State of Israel to pay 75% of her treatment in a rehabilitation center, probably in the West Bank. This treatment might not be the best she could receive since there are more experienced and well equipped centers within Israel. But still, the decision is quite an achievement as far as Israeli courts are concerned. Most shockingly, the court held Lulu's parents partly responsible — negligent in allowing her out of the house knowing that soldiers were always on the streets! I must admit that what disturbs our hearts most is that her medical condition has not changed. Her only reaction, when spoken to, is crying, and I am sure that although she was severely impaired she understands the state she is in. If you have suggestions about how you can be of any assistance to Lulu, it would be highly appreciated.

*Yours,
Ruchama Marton*

Unfortunately I don't have Paul response to my letter. I don't even remember if he did something concerning Lulu's case. But I'm sure he did.

With my big brother Paul we agreed with Albert Camus statement that resistance is the sole alternative for those who refuse to become either victims or perpetrators.

Sometime in 2005 I've wrote him:

Dear Paul,

We, not only you and me, but also those Israeli-Jews together with our Palestinian friends from the two side of the green-line, for whom the struggle against the poison of power is our only choice in order not to become either victims or perpetrators, our struggle is addressed both inside and outside. Not just outside.

If not you, with whom can I share the internal struggles within Physicians for Human rights?

Part of my fellows in PHR's board of directors sees PHR as an organization of physicians and medics. Not as people who fight for human rights. In other words, as a-political organization for relief and charity, good doers, helpful and compassionate doctors , but not fighters against the roots and sources of evil.

In sum, they are not radicals.

Soon internal elections will take place within PHR. We are facing a very serious struggle and I would not exaggerate if I'll say that it is a die or live one. If the "good dowers" (Les gens bien) will win, from my point of view it is the end of our NGO.

I do not intend to see the organization that I've founded becoming a philanthropic-humanitarian NGO that do not understand the roots of evil that is ongoing here on a systemic daily basis. Actually to "do good" is to strengthen the existing system, the occupation, the expropriation and the regime of evil that roles this country.

This is why I ask you my dear Paul to wish me luck as I intend to write the manifesto of our organization in the hope to convince my fellows to be radical and political .

Yours Ruchama

While the regime of evil that governs our daily life in our torn and tormented country continues its expansion and domination, we, the few Israeli-Jews together with our Palestinian fellows and friends from around the world continue our struggle against it. We continue it despite the so called "Israeli democracy" and despite the criminal indulgence and complicity of the "international community".

I recall one of Paul's sayings: "to resist is a long tiering and unfinished struggle that is worth to be fought just in order to keep a human face and to avoid the unbearable choice between being a perpetrator or a victime.

Or was it just in one of our imagined dialogues?

Paul, do you remember? We knew each other since our childhood. Surely you do, since you are my big brother.