

“When the Butterfly Flaps Her Wings in Gaza”

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Half of all Palestinian children have had a family member killed by Israelis, and many, perhaps most have seen Palestinian adults beaten and humiliated by Israelis. Also, many Palestinian men are tortured, which is a matter of great shame when they are broken by Israeli interrogation. Many young Israeli soldiers are anxious and guilt-ridden, and some refuse to serve in the Occupied Territories, others are suicidal. Palestinians and Jews have both suffered greatly, bringing us Jewish fear and Palestinian oppression. Their recent cultural stories are filled with competing victimization. Is there any hope for restitution and reconciliation?

In a recent interview weeks before the pullout in Gaza, Dr. Eyad El-Sarraj, Founder and Director of the Gaza Community Mental Health Program said, “It is our dignity that we have to forgive if we want to be a dignified people...According to our moral code we will forgive but only when we are acknowledged and when the Israelis acknowledge their responsibility in what they have caused us...It is our cultural code that tells us we have to forgive but only when the Israelis, the other party that has inflicted so much pain on us, would acknowledge that pain and acknowledge our civility and say we are sorry.” Dr, Eyad El-Sarraj, unpublished interview, May 22, 2005, Gaza City

Using data gathered by NGOs in Israel and the Occupied Territories, as well as unpublished papers and interviews, I will discuss the potential for reconciliation between Palestinians and Israelis. The emphasis will be on dissolving past indignities through the application of conflict resolution methods as they apply to whole systems change.