

From Heart of Stone to Heart of
Flesh: Evolutionary Journey from
Extremism to Moderation

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ta ethika

herausgegeben durch

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Introduction

This book examines the formative life phase of Palestinian intellectual Mohammed Suleiman Dajani Daoudi, who, from the mid-1960s through to the mid-1970s, was an extremist student leader advocating violence and armed struggle to eradicate the Jewish State of Israel in order to establish on its ruins the Arab State of Palestine. However, he has emerged as one of the leading moderate Palestinian thinkers and religious reformers who calls for reformation of Muslims rather than Islam and propagating the idea of a *Wasatia* moderate way of life⁹, characterized by esteem for all religions as well as calling for a two-state solution for the Palestinian–Israeli conflict.¹⁰ It scrutinizes his revolutionary past, moderate present, and future hopeful future, in order to examine the ethical roots of his transformation from extremism to moderation, and the effects of the ethical guidelines he received from family and teachers when he was at school, which were to be, eventually, the guiding light that steered him to the right path and to do the right thing in search of the good life. It investigates his upbringing as formed through the influence of his social, financial, and political environment, family roots, educational background, and religious upbringing. I also examine other factors influencing his thinking such as his encounter with Western values and ethics.

The book's objective is to demonstrate the significance of ethics for human behavioral and intellectual change from extremism and inflexibility (heart of stone) to moderation and reconciliation (heart of flesh), to analyse what causes transformation in people, and the role of family,

9 *Wasatia* is a term in Arabic which has different meanings. Linguistically it means middle or center; and religiously it means temperance, tolerance, justice, and middle ground.

10 See W. Egginton, *In Defense of Religious Moderation*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2011, pp. 135–140.

religion, education, and ethics in realizing this¹¹ It focuses on the descriptive ethical dimension of the events that play a major role in shaping the individual and collective consciousness and memory.¹² Exposure to the Israeli-Palestinian narratives, educational insights, personal experiences, and openness to the perspectives of the other may serve to aid our journey from extremism to moderation.

My goal is to contribute to the ethical research on reaching moderation by being just, doing what is right, and taking the middle path; and reconciliation through showing empathy, building trust, and having compassion. The vision of transforming cold, stony hearts full of bitterness, and anger, to hearts of flesh full of life, hope, and optimism, holds more potential for a happy life. Thus, the book focuses on how ethics plays a role in changing individuals from being absolutely exclusive to becoming totally inclusive, causing a person to shift his political orientation from one end of the spectrum to the middle through realizing the ethical principle of Moderation¹³ and the Aristotlian Golden mean¹⁴. This would be in line with the thesis which argues that practitioners of conflict resolution need to focus more on reconciliation (the restoration of confidence, friendship, and harmony between rivals) than on mere conflict resolution.¹⁵ According to the authors, reconciliation techniques shift the focus in two ways. First, they take more of a grassroots approach, building agreement among

11 The 'Heart of Flesh' and 'Heart of Stone' is in reference to an image in the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel: 'I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.' Ezekiel, 36:26 (*Jubilee Bible*, Life Sentence Publishing, 2010).

12 M. S. Dajani Daoudi, 'Israelis and Palestinians: Contested Narratives', Centre de Cultura Contemporània de Barcelona, [website], http://www.cccb.org/rcs_gene/mohammed_s._dajani.pdf, (accessed 01.10.2015).

13 See: N. Epstein, "Mohammed Dajani Daoudi // Evolution of a Moderate: Once a radical Fatah leader, the Palestinian professor has come under fire for taking his students to Auschwitz to teach reconciliation." *Moment*, [magazine], July/August 2014, p. 23–59.

14 See: H. Rackham, *The Nicomachean Ethics by Aristotle*, London, W. Heinemann; New York, G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1926.

15 See Y. Bar-Siman-Tov (ed.), *From Conflict Resolution to Reconciliation*, Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2004.

the members of rival communities, not only between leaders. Second, reconciliation takes a long-term view of dispute resolution.¹⁶

The answers to the question of how to transform human behavior from extremism to moderation hold enormous significance not only for the communities in conflict in the region but also within any community where there is inter-communal conflict. Extremists are attempting to change the course of history to fit their own vision. Should extremists triumph, the political stability, economic prosperity, and human security of people living in states dominated by extremists will be at risk. International trade and human mobility will be at risk. Conflict will spread and people will resort to violence, armed struggle, and terrorism in order to control resources. Monopolies on power would become more common; economies would deteriorate, and genocide would become more prevalent. The middle path would be the way leading to a meaningful life.

The book asks whether ethics has a role in changing extremists with 'hearts of stone' and 'big dreams' to 'hearts of flesh with small hope'. The first thinks in terms of exclusion, and mass-deporting the other in order to enjoy exclusively their rights in denial of the rights of others; the second are those committed to peaceful coexistence and mutual cooperation with one another. It specifically addresses, as a task of descriptive applied ethics, how and why a leading Palestinian influential figure who once used to be a hard-liner became a soft-liner open to dialog and reconciliation. What role did knowing the other, and showing empathy for the 'suffering of the other', play in accepting and understanding the other?

In other words, the question the case study addresses is: How did the evolution of Mohammed Dajani from extremist to moderate take place? What were the ethical motivations which motivated Dajani in this conflict to move from delegitimization, demonization, non-recognition, and

16 Y. Bar-Siman-Tov (eds.), *From Conflict Resolution to Reconciliation*, Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2004, publisher note on book cover. See <http://oxfordindex.oup.com/view/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195166439.001.0001http://www.amazon.com/Conflict-Resolution-Reconciliation-Yaacov-Bar-Siman-Tov/dp/0195166434>, (accessed 01.10.2015). Also see A. Blumberg, 'Palestinian Students Visit Auschwitz for Educational Trip, Return Home to Sharp Criticism', Huffington Post, [website], http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/04/15/palestinian-students-auschwitz_n_5148231.html, (accessed 01.10.2015).

dehumanization of the other to legitimization, recognition, appreciation, and humanization of the other? What moral principles guided this transformation from stone to flesh, and what role did his moral and ethical upbringing play in changing his behavior? What role did his ethical identity play in this transformation? How does the Hölderlin Perspective relate to the *Wasatia* Perspective as a tool for the reconciliation process? Should reconciliation and restorative justice precede or follow the resolution of conflict? What are the values that lit the path of Dajani following his conversion to moderation?

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