



# New Garden Community Church (Unitarian Universalist) - a labor-peace church

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August 3, 2006

*"Love for the Earth, Justice for the People"*

**\*\* No meetings in August \*\***

*except...*

You're invited to join us for  
**Meditation on the Lake**  
each Sunday morning from 8-9am  
312-405-9470

We'll meet and sit on a grassy spot by the bike path, just South of the end of lower Randolph, where the path curves into the lake to the Northeast before Navy Pier. Bring a cushion, towel or blanket to sit on.

## Calendar:

- **Sunday, September 3, 11am** – We celebrate **Labor Day** with our annual **picnic in Union Park**, corner of Warren and Ashland, with music and a labor speaker. Please bring a side dish; we'll have brats to grill and lemonade.

## Hope is a Heart Thing

I have felt so horrified and discouraged at the violence in the Middle East that it has been hard to even listen to the news. I haven't done anything, besides signing a letter calling for an immediate ceasefire, from Chicago interfaith religious leaders to our President and Senators.

But yesterday on NPR Terry Gross interviewed two authors, Etgar Keret and Samir El-Youssef, one Israeli, child of Holocaust survivors, one Palestinian, who grew up in a refugee camp.

Together they have written a book of short stories called *Gaza Blues*.

Etgar Keret, the Israeli author, is condemned by Israelis, left and right, for "not taking a stand," for not being political enough in his writing. Ditto for Samir El-Youssef, the Palestinian author. Both being outsiders, meeting one another was a relief, and, Keret joked, they formed a kind of support group for each other.

– My writing *is* very political, he said. It's just not black and white about issues. That is so boring. Real life is much more complicated.

A Palestinian bought his book, thinking that the story called "The busdriver who wanted to be God" was about a suicide bomber. The man was disappointed to find out it was only about a man with a big ego.

There is something funny about seriousness being popped like an overinflated balloon. The serious one doesn't think so, of course, but it seems to me that there would be a lot less violence in the world if people could laugh more, especially at themselves.

El-Youssef, the Palestinian, spoke of growing up surrounded by the rhetoric of enmity, of hatred. But, he said, it goes on so long, you just get tired of hating. You realize that everyone wants the same thing, just to be able to live, to live peacefully.

The current situation reminds him of the time right after the signing of the Oslo peace accords in 1993. People in Hezbollah, in Southern Lebanon, decided to do everything they could to destroy the peace process. The mistake Israel made then, and is making again today, El-Youssef said, is to accommodate

them, to do what they want, that is, destroy hopes for peace, embody The Enemy.

A Jewish friend of mine, a staunch Zionist, said about Israel's actions in Lebanon, "They have no choice." Such statements infuriate me – I usually imagine that people are rationalizing when they say such things, but I think – what if this is true?

What if they have no choice in the same way that a person who has been emotionally abused as a child – and remains unconscious of her pain – reproduces that abuse, visiting it on her own children?

If this is the case, one can try to protect others from harm, and help the person (country) find some healing from her past.

The conservative cartoon in the Tribune Tuesday has the coyote pup annoying his friend by continually dropping pebbles on her head, and when she hauls off and clobbers him, he complains "disproportionate response."

The following day's cartoon, Kofi Annan intervenes, and is shooed away. The cartoon

trivializes everything about the conflict, from the perception of harm to the loss of life, the destruction of infrastructure, and massive displacement of people.

When I heard that a number of Israeli soldiers had been killed in a fire fight, this brought home to me again how evil and destructive war is, how it breeds sorrow and vengeance on both sides.

Etgar Keret, the Israeli author, said in response to Terry's question, that yes it is hard to live in a place so often threatened – his wife says that one doesn't live, one survives. But he adds, you always hope you'll be able to change it – if you leave, you won't have the influence.

His humor, his equanimity made me think, but he is not just surviving! This is someone who is living. He loves, he risks, he creates, he laughs. Neither he nor his Palestinian friend have allowed the fear and the threats to close the doors to their being fully present in this life.

peace, Jean

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Etgar Keret, a best-selling author in Israel whose books have also been published in the United States, talks about recent events in the Middle East. Keret collaborated with Palestinian author Samir El-Youssef for the book *Gaza Blues*. Keret contributed a collection of short stories and El-Youssef, a novella.

# Middle East: Palestinian Perspective: Samir El-Youssef

Palestinian author, journalist and literary critic Samir El-Youssef was born in a refugee camp in Lebanon. He now lives in London, and has collaborated with his friend, Israeli writer Etgar Keret, on a book, *Gaza Blues*. El-Youssef provides his views on recent events in the Middle East.

Even if such a statement is a rationalization, all one can do is protect vulnerable others and try to help her heal – because it seems that great harm must still have been done to someone who says that if they *feel* greatly threatened, they have the right to respond disproportionately.