

## Sami Awad: A Holy Land for All

by Awakin Call Editors

"Peacemaking is not about making a political commitment, it's a commitment to a deep healing of deep traumas. Until we do that we can never do peacemaking."

When Sami was just 16, his uncle Mubarak Awad was permanently exiled for taking a leading role in the Palestinian nonviolent resistance movement during the first Intifada. "That is how dangerous non-violence is," says Sami. His parents were refugees, displaced by the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and Sami watched his own father abused by Israeli authorities. Though Sami "had every excuse and justification to hate Israelis," he did not. In spite of the violence, his mother emphasized the Christian teachings of "loving your enemies" and forgiveness, while his uncle exposed him to the messages of non-violence from Jesus to Mahatma Gandhi to Martin Luther King Jr.

In the late 90s, Sami founded Holy Land Trust (HLT), a non-profit organization in Bethlehem, whose mission is to find peace, justice and understanding for people in this land that is sacred to faith communities the world over. HLT seeks to uncover the root causes and real reasons that people are not seeking and finding peace. The organization engages in deep healing work for the trauma—of both Palestinians and Israelis—from the existential fears and violence that mark their lives in the Holy Land. For Sami and HLT, healing the collective traumas that prevent peace is an intense and spiritual process focused on personal transformation and commitment to community. In seeking to create a Holy Land for all, Sami asks: "Can I make a decision that is motivated by the future that I seek—not the past that I experience?"

In one word, Sami describes himself as an "activist." He is continually plumbing the depths of how real change happens and how true healing occurs. He defines sacred activism as not just sitting and meditating, but engaging in direct action--stopping the violence—in a way that is infused by the mindfulness work and spiritual practices peacebuilders have been engaging in over the past decades.

"I now believe that my own liberation as a Palestinian is not only about ending the Israeli military occupation, but also about addressing all aspects of violence—be they political, social, economic or environmental. Nonviolence is not a tactic to be taken out of the box when it seems fit to use. It is a way of life."

Recently, he has been exploring the connection to nature as a peacebuilder's guide and a comfort—to find the sacred understanding and messages that come through the elements of water and land. Sami and HLT are working with other partners to explore the intersections of environmental justice, non-violent resistance to the Israeli occupation, and sacred activism.

Sami lives outside Bethlehem in the West Bank. He holds a Doctoral Degree in Divinity

from the Chicago Theological Seminary, a Master's Degree in International Relations from the American University in Washington D.C., and an undergraduate degree in Political Science from the University of Kansas. Sami's courage to be among the first activists to see Israelis not as "the Other" but as brothers and sisters together in this land—and his willingness to engage in the trauma work in both communities—inspired the Euphrates Institute to create the Visionary of the Year award in order to honor his unique vision. Today, as the director of programs at Holy Land Trust, Sami travels widely and is a frequent speaker, and leads intensive trainings and retreats for Palestinians and Israelis.

For more inspiration, join an Awakin Call with Sami Awad this Saturday. More details and RSVP info [here](#).