
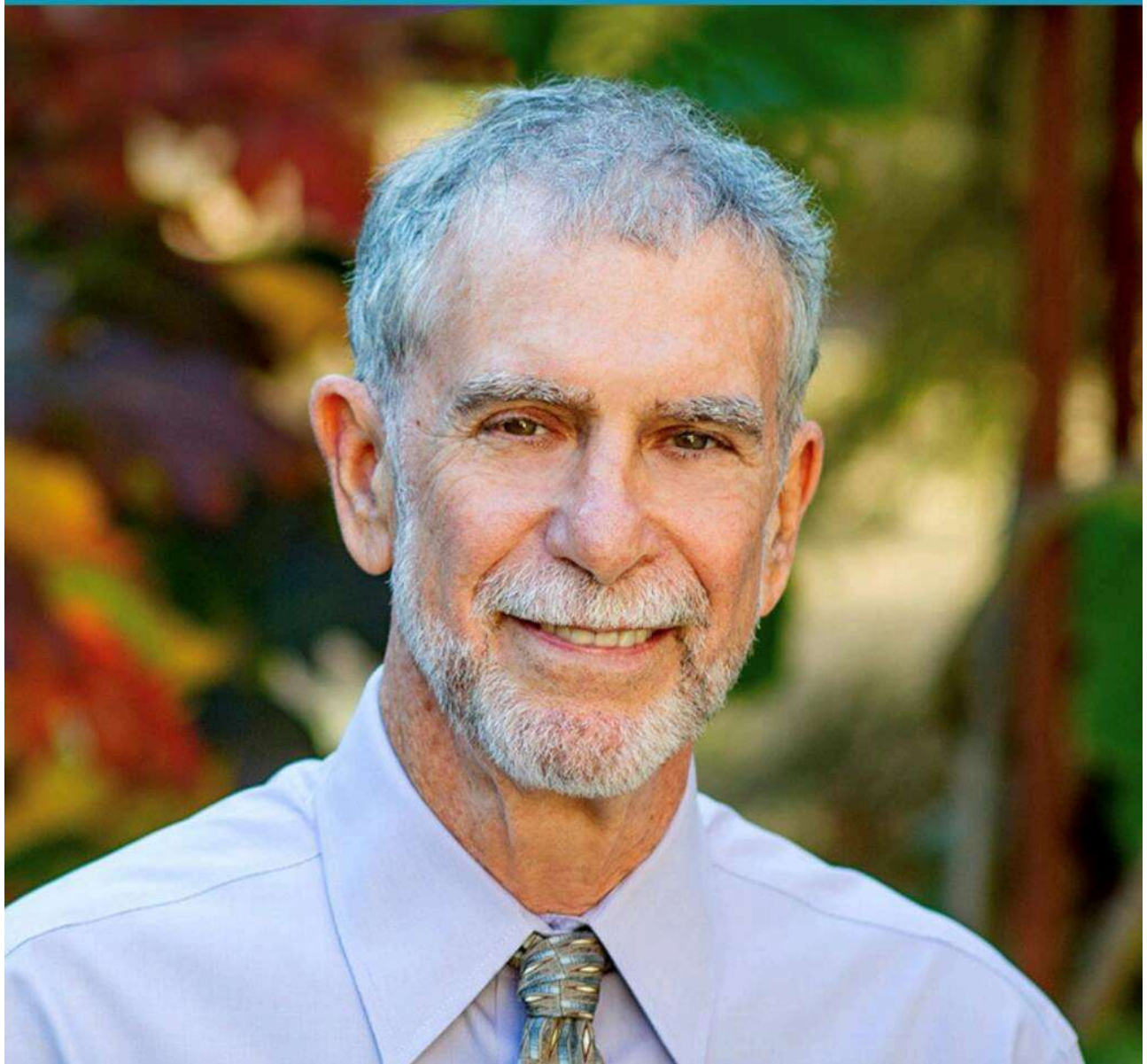


Psychologist to deliver talk on Israeli-Palestinian conflict

“I left Israel for moral reasons,” said psychologist Ofer Zur, regarding why he moved from his native country in 1980. “I did not want to be part of an immoral, occupying force or occupying nation, because the occupation is not only unjust and wrong, but ultimately destroys the occupier.” |  11



Ofer Zur, a licensed psychologist, lecturer, ethics consultant and forensic expert, will deliver a presentation on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on Sunday, April 14, at Sonoma Community Center. (Courtesy of Praxis Peace Institute)

DANIEL JOHNSON

INDEX-TRIBUNE STAFF WRITER

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While serving as an officer in the Israeli army in the early 1970s, Ofer Zur was assigned to establish its presence and affirm its dominance in an overcrowded, poverty-stricken and polluted refugee camp in the Gaza Strip.

At one point, he heard a tall, thin, young Arab woman, fully clothed in a burqa, standing on a shattered concrete piece. She held a tiny baby on her hip and two malnourished, frightened young boys were by her side.

She yelled and cursed from the bottom of her heart at the heavily armed Israeli soldiers who stood by a bulldozer that had just demolished her home. She allegedly hid or shared a living space with a "suspicious" Arab man, who was nowhere to be seen.

"It was clear that she did not do anything to harm any Israeli soldier," Zur wrote in "[I Was Her](#)," an article posted on his website. "She was simply living here in the squalid conditions of this refugee camp, where she was probably born, desperately trying to survive and raise three malnourished children.

"I was overtaken by the urge to go stand by her, to scream alongside her, to add my own outraged voice to hers and help her be heard. I wanted to help penetrate the shields of the steely, masked faces of the soldiers who had obliterated her home and installed a lifelong hatred and rage against the occupying Israeli forces in her children."

Two days later, Zur felt he embodied the woman's feelings when confronting a top general of the Israeli military Southern Command who was visiting the camp with his ranks.

Zur's presentation at Sonoma Community Center

Ofer Zur's presentation, "Civil Dialogue About the Uncivil Middle East: Israel, Gaza and the West Bank," offered by Praxis Peace Institute, will take place at Sonoma Community Center, 276 E. Napa St. in Sonoma, at 2 p.m. on Sunday, April 14. Tickets cost \$20 for Praxis Peace Institute members and \$25 for the general public. For more information, access praxispeace.org/events.

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“What are we doing erasing refugees’ homes and leaving innocent women and children homeless and stripped down from human dignity?” Zur said. “Being her, the rage kept rushing out of me. When she yelled her piece, no one had responded. And likewise, when I spoke, all were silent.”

A few years later, Zur chose to leave Israel, where he had been born and raised, to live in the United States.

“I left Israel for moral reasons,” he said. “I did not want to be part of an immoral, occupying force or occupying nation because the occupation is not only unjust and wrong, but ultimately destroys the occupier.”

In 1988, Zur and his wife relocated to Sonoma, where he lived for 20 years before moving to his current residence in Sebastopol. He has forged a career as a licensed psychologist, lecturer, ethics consultant and forensic expert, and is the former director of the Zur Institute, which offers more than 180 online continuing education courses for mental health practitioners.

He is also the author or co-author of five books and hundreds of articles.

Recently, Zur has been devoting much of his time to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which he will discuss in a presentation, “Civil Dialogue About the Uncivil Middle East: Israel, Gaza and the West Bank.” The talk will be offered by Praxis Peace Institute on Sunday, April 14, at Sonoma Community Center.

He believes that a solution to the conflict can be achieved.

“Competing historical claims of who was first, Moses or Allah; who owns what, Muslims or Jews; or who is ‘holier’ should not be part of the current cease fire negotiation,” he wrote in [“An Israeli Palestinian Solution is Possible,”](#) an article on his website. “Israel gets its 1948 territory, and the Palestinians get the entire West Bank — settlers are out — and Gaza, Hamas and all.”

Zur is hopeful that some strides toward achieving such an agreement can be made soon.

“When (Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin) Netanyahu and the religious parties in power lose the next election, there is hope that a more reasonable government can negotiate with a new, independent Palestinian neighboring, but unfriendly state,” he said.

He said that the recent killing of more than 34,000 people — primarily recent women and children — during the Israeli-Palestinian war make harmonious coexistence extremely difficult, though.

“Due to the recent atrocities on both sides, I do not see much hope in the near future for an agreement between Israel and the Palestinians to live peacefully next to each other,” he said. “Another big concern is that the West Bank, with 3 million Palestinians, could erupt and battle the 700,000 mainly fanatic, intolerant, entitled religious Jews.”

Zur hopes that in two or three generations, the conflict will have de-escalated.

But he is troubled that antisemitism has been growing throughout the world since Hamas and several other Palestinian militant groups launched coordinated attacks in southern Israel on Oct. 7, 2023.

“In the wake of the Oct. 7 attack and the subsequent Israel-Hamas war, antisemitism has skyrocketed around the world, particularly in progressive, liberal, leftist circles in the United States,” he said.

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Zur also is very concerned about the future of Israel, where some of his family members and associates live.

“I am deeply concerned for the well-being of my sister, her four children and 12 grandchildren, and my friends and colleagues in Israel,” he said.

Zur’s sister, his only sibling, lives on a kibbutz there with her family. Three of their four grandparents died during the holocaust. Their parents, Assia Zur and David Zur, were liberal

peace activists, which had a lasting impact on them.

"I grew up in a socialist family where from a very young age my sister and I needed to report to our parents at dinner time our 'good deeds of the day,'" Zur said. "Issues of justice and moral concerns were discussed at dinner. Meaningful conversations were more important than food."

He proceeded to earn a bachelor's degree in physical chemistry in 1975 from Hebrew University of Jerusalem, a master's degree in counseling psychology from Lesley College in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in 1981 and a doctorate in psychology at Wright Institute in Berkeley, California, in 1984.

Zur has traveled throughout the world and worked on seven continents.

"The nonstop focus of my work, to this day, is 'doing good' by enhancing justice, helping the poor, encouraging world peace and teaching critical thinking," he said.

Zur plans to continue his efforts to promote peace and stability in the Middle East by lecturing and writing about the psychology of peace and the psychology of enmity, war and hate.

"I also will continue to explain that occupation cannot last, and it hurts the occupier," he said.

Reach the reporter, Dan Johnson, at daniel.johnson@sonomanews.com.

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