

“Marketing Strategy for the Guidelines and the Code of Conduct for Pilgrimages for Transformation (PIFT) to Palestine-Israel”.

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Kairos Pilgrimage

by

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There is no country on earth that monopolizes tourism the same way Israel does. Israel knows that tourism is its window to the world: a first, powerful glimpse onto the image it wishes to project, as well as a way to shape and control this image. In this sense, tourism is also a tool that Israel uses to market itself as a civilized democratic country.

Most countries use tourism to market themselves; when it comes to this general purpose, I don't mind too much. But, in the case of Israel, its strategy is not to market *itself*; rather, it works to demonize the Palestinians, vilifying their narrative and stripping them of the places, resources and rights involved in telling it. During the past decades, Israel has actively prevented Palestinians from taking the initiative, let alone the lead, in its own tourism. Indeed, how could they, given that Israel controls all borders and maintains exclusive authority over who can enter and travel about -- and who can't?

In recent years, Palestinians have been trying to counter these unjust restrictions and put themselves on the map -- in both literal and metaphorical senses. Alternative tourism groups have flourished in Palestine as a way to secure a new kind of tourism -- tourism from within -- that tells our stories and speaks our truth. Predictably, Israel recognizes the power of these alternative tours and continues placing obstacles in their path. But Palestinian tourism has already gained great momentum, and its participants are determined to keep building its networks, resources, and communities of supporters.

Kairos Palestine believes in the fundamental importance of its call to “Come and See.” Many people come to Palestine and Israel as visitors, but they don't see. Kairos emphasizes the power of “seeing” because we believe that for many people of goodwill -- as is true of the many tourists who come to visit Israel and Palestine -- a clear vision of the reality around them is enough for them to be transformed. Kairos knows many people for whom this is the case

In this presentation, I will give 20 points, divided into four different subjects, to explain the power of seeing and why we need people to truly open their eyes.

A. When Do We Need Kairos Pilgrimages?

1. When the “See” becomes easier for tourists than for indigenous communities.

Palestinians are not free to “travel” in their own home: this means that many sights, many forms of

seeing, are denied to them. As a result of the illegal Israeli occupation, Palestinians' daily lives are controlled by roadblocks, checkpoints (both established permanent ones and temporary checkpoints set up without any prior warning), draconian permit systems, and other restrictions. Due to the enclosure of Jerusalem, most Palestinians (both Christians and Muslims) are unable to physically access their major religious and touristic sites.

Tourism, in addition to being a cultural enterprise, is obviously an economic one. Since Israel monopolizes the tourist industry, as well as its corresponding narratives and resources, they also monopolize the profits that result. For Palestinians, this adds insult to injury: not only does Israel prevent Palestinian access to their own lands, holy sites, and stories, it also prevents their access to the income generated by tourism. Given that the Palestinian economy has already been strangled by occupation -- rendered dependent on the Israeli economy even from the other side of the wall -- this is yet another act of injustice.

Israel's monopoly over tourism is also used to score political points in the eyes of the international community. A recent poll conducted by the BBC and Globescan surveyed over 22,000 participants across 22 countries about the countries that have the worst influence in the world. Israel ranked third, along with North Korea, following Iran and Pakistan. The reason why they ranked third, not first, is that some African countries gave them good marks -- like Nigeria, for instance, which has a high rate of tourism to Israel. So, tourism has a direct impact on masking political realities, not to mention painting them in rosier colors in the political arena.

2. When the "See" is perceived as a threat to national security and is confronted and fought against.

Many people around the world have already "seen" the truth of the Israeli occupation and engage in public nonviolent actions to show what they see. Israel doesn't like this, of course, and tries to stop them. There are many examples: the Gaza-bound Freedom Flotilla (which was invaded by the Israeli army in international waters, ultimately killing nine activists and injuring many others); the "Welcome to Palestine" campaign, where people from many different countries peacefully try to enter Israel while stating that they intend to visit Palestine (Israel denies entry to most and deports them on grounds of being "pro-Palestine"); the conference "Christ at the Checkpoint," which gathered over 600 international and local Christians in Bethlehem to address the issue of how to find hope in the midst of conflict.

Israeli opposition to these events only sharpens the focus of our sight.

3. When the state monopolizes the "seeing" industry and turn it into a tool to justify its own oppression and brutality.

We discussed this earlier with respect to Israel's manipulation of tourism in order to whitewash its image before the international community.

4. When the tourist comes to our home thinking that he is visiting the holy land -- while, in reality, he is visiting a land without holiness, where the dignity of God's creation is humiliated on daily basis.

Such a country can't be legitimately called a holy land. Maintaining this illusion -- both due to the people leading tours and the people who participate in them -- does not bring hope to this land, as many

visitors think. On the contrary: it removes hope.

5. When the oppressed indigenous adopt the narrative of the oppressor because they fear losing their jobs.

Some Palestinian tourist guides have come to call the West Bank "Judea and Samaria," in accordance with the official Israeli discourse, or refer to all our land as "disputed land." This is the result of fear: fear of being reprimanded or fired. And it speaks to an urgent need for Kairos Palestine, for Kairos pilgrimages, for a kind of tourism that not only respects Palestinian dignity but is also produced by it.

We aren't simply proposing that indigenous communities get a higher percentage of the tourism "cake." What we need, rather, is a complete transformation of the system itself.

B. When Can We Call a Pilgrimage a "Kairos Pilgrimage"?

1. When the "See" becomes a necessary step in the journey of a spiritual pilgrim.

In this sense, we understand the spiritual necessity of the "See" as answering needs beyond those found in an exclusively spiritual context. The *hajj*, for instance, is not a journey undertaken for comfort: rather, it is undertaken out of concern for a person's spiritual, emotional, intellectual and social wellbeing.

The "See" is an expression of commitment to the other; of understanding that, along with the other, I am a link in a chain.

2. When the "See" becomes a step based on will and determination, not a step taken by accident.

3. When the "See" becomes an act of repentance for the sins of silence and ignorance.

4. When the "See" becomes an experience of living and walking with the oppressed, not just talk about them.

In earlier eras, pilgrimages lasted for many years to cover the same distance! In this way, then, the distance was *part* of the pilgrimage. Today, given all the speed we live with -- the speed of technology, of transportation -- we must find new ways to grasp the obligations of and commitment to pilgrimage. We could say that we must develop a "same distance" spirituality.

5. When the "See" becomes a true journey to solidarity.

One starts from bias (a state of being against someone) and travels to a change of belief; from changing the belief to skepticism; from skepticism to committed engagement and involvement, to true accompaniment and solidarity.

C. When Must We Be Careful?

1. When the "See" becomes an alternative to action.

"Come and See" is a beginning, not a conclusion. What must follow it "go back and witness."

2. When the "See" takes much longer than the desired result.

By this I mean that it is not enough for people to simply see and not act; seeing must not replace action.

3. *When the “See” takes the form of normalization with the occupier.*

Today, some Palestinian officials call upon Arabs and Muslims to go visit Jerusalem. We need to be careful: this could be seen as an act of normalization with the occupation. In other words, it addresses people as if the situation on the ground were normal, as if Israel were a country that actually respected freedom of worship, when this is not the case in any sense. Indeed, Israel interpreted these calls as recognition of their democracy. But we must not forget that, in reality, Israel is a country that systematically denies the indigenous people, the Palestinians, the right to visit their holy sites and pray there. Such a country can't truly be democratic or civilized, and we must not credit it with being these things before it respects our rights in a democratic and civilized way.

4. *When the oppressed look at the “See” simply as an industry they need to compete in and forget the original goal, which is solidarity and action.*

5. *When the “See” becomes restricted to the rich and those able to secure a visa.*

We need to detach ourselves from the idea that the matter in hand is only tourism. It is much, much bigger than tourism: what we're calling for is a fundamental act of advocacy and solidarity, and then making this act into a broader practice. This is the great challenge we're faced with today.

D. When Do We Bear the Fruits of the Kairos “See”?

1. *When it becomes an act of conscious struggle.*

2. *When it becomes an act serious solidarity...*

... despite all the propaganda against tourism in Palestine and its supposed “dangers,” in addition to all the negative stereotypes about Palestinians.

3. *When it becomes a platform for continuous education.*

Kairos pilgrimages remain powerful and productive when accompanied by materials that are easy to use and understand, and when based on planning, coordination, cooperation, and a thorough database.

4. *When the Palestinian tourism capital realizes that dignity comes first and financial benefits come second.*

5. *When all of us -- both pilgrims and Palestinians -- are transformed.*