

June 2021  
Vol. 50 No. 3

# SHALOM

*Jewish Peace Letter*

Published by the Jewish Peace Fellowship

## C O N T E N T S



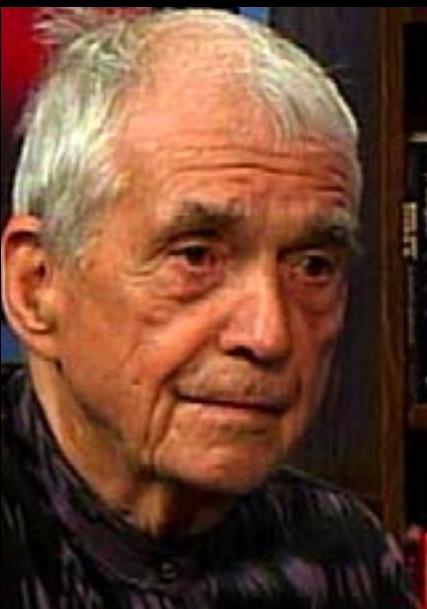
*John Lewis Pg. 3*

# Compassion, Conscience, Commitment



*Thich Nhat Hanh Pg. 12*

## Trials & Triumphs of Courageous Nonviolent Resisters



*Daniel Berrigan Pg. 9*



*Hallel Rabin Pg. 16*

*We ask you for help formulating new directions for the JPF. Pg. 2*

*From Where I Sit*

Stefan Merken

**Jewish Peace Fellowship's 80th B'day**

**T**his year the Jewish Peace Fellowship celebrates its 80th year as a voice for peace within the American Jewish Community and a Jewish voice within the worldwide peace movement.

The mere fact that the JPF has survived this long is worth noting. There have been caring individuals who stepped up over the years to carry the banner of JPF. A few of the giants who have passed but are not forgotten: Naomi Goodman, Rabbi Michael Robinson, Murray Polner, Rabbi Isadore Hoffman, Howard Fast, Rabbi Steven Weiss, Albert Einstein, Rabbi Leo Baeck and Rabbi Leonard Beerman.

I am often asked by non-members and new joiners how the Jewish Peace Fellowship came to be. In the early months of 1941 there were a handful of young Jewish men who chose not to serve in the military. At that time the only alternative the Selective Service System had was to put these young men in federal prison; there was no organization to step forward and offer support for these men, helping them with friendly advice and minor necessities, and many of their families had disowned them.

At a meeting of the Reformed Jewish Movement, Rabbi Isadore Hoffman, Jane Evans, and Rabbi Abraham Cronbach formed the Jewish Peace Fellowship to fill this gap. Over the years many young men have reached out to the JPF for advice and assistance on issues of nonviolence and draft resistance.

Now it is time to change directions for the JPF, find new programs and rebuild the board of directors. If we are to continue, we need to formulate an updated set of goals and priorities, set up a new program and have an active membership. If you are interested in pacifist ideals and willing to serve on the board, please contact me. We have no plans to meet face to face, but rather on Zoom. The board will probably meet only a few times per year.

We are not asking for financial support, only help in formulating a new direction. I hope to hear from you. ☆



*We ask you for help formulating new directions for the JPF.*

**STEFAN MERKEN** is Chair of the Jewish Peace Fellowship and co-editor of *Shalom*.

## SHALOM

Published by the Jewish Peace Fellowship • Box 271 • Nyack, N.Y. 10960 • (845) 358-4601

**HONORARY PRESIDENT** Rabbi Philip J. Bentley • **CHAIR** Stefan Merken • **VICE PRESIDENT** Rabbi Leonard Beerman z”

**EDITORS** Stefan Merken, email: [stefan.merken@gmail.com](mailto:stefan.merken@gmail.com) & Richard Middleton-Kaplan, email: [rkaplan001@ameritech.net](mailto:rkaplan001@ameritech.net)  
**EDITOR EMERITUS** Murray Polner z”

**CONTRIBUTING EDITORS** Patrick Henry, Susannah Heschel, E. James Lieberman, Adam Simms, Lawrence S. Wittner

*Established in 1941*

E-mail: [jpf@forusa.org](mailto:jpf@forusa.org) • World Wide Web: <http://www.jewishpeacefellowship.org>

*Signed articles are the opinions of the writers and do not necessarily reflect the views of the JPF.*



## Lost Interview, Now Found

Rev. John Dear

## Remembering John Lewis

**I**t was 1995, I was 35 and fresh out of jail after hammering on a nuclear weapon in a Plowshares disarmament action with Philip Berrigan. A newly ordained Catholic priest, I was serving two years under house arrest in a community of priests on K Street in Washington, D.C. A friend from Ireland called and said he wanted to fly over and film me talking with people about Christian nonviolence. I wrote to Congressman John Lewis. He responded immediately: “Of course! Let’s talk! Come on over!”

\*\*\*\*

JD: John, let me start right off and ask you what nonviolence means for you and how you got involved and committed to the life of Christian nonviolence?

**JL:** I grew up in rural Alabama during the 1940s and 1950s in a Christian home where there was a great deal of love. At an early age, I came to appreciate the philosophy and discipline of Christian love. I view nonviolence as Christian love in action. It is part of my faith; it is believing that love is the most powerful force in the universe. And somehow, somehow, you have to live it.

JD: Tell me how you got involved in organizing sit-ins against segregation in restaurants and how you formed the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee.

**JL:** I was deeply inspired by Martin Luther King, Jr. and Rosa Parks. When I was a young child in Troy, Alabama, about fifty miles south of Montgomery, I would visit Montgomery where I saw signs that said “white men, colored men, white women, colored women, white waiting, colored waiting.” Segregation was the order of the day. I resented the system of segregation and wanted to do something about it.

So, as a student in Nashville where I was attending the American Baptist Theological Seminary and later as a student at Fisk University, I started studying the philosophy and discipline of nonviolence and got involved in a series

*“I view  
nonviolence as  
Christian love  
in action.”*

*[We bring John Lewis’s voice to our pages now because we miss hearing it and need his counsel in our time of Black Lives Matter and new restrictive voting laws in Georgia and elsewhere. His voice comes in the form of a long-lost 1995 interview with Reverend John Dear.—The Editors.]*

*Continued on next page*



*Lewis has tape on his head, marking the spot where he was struck during racial violence in Montgomery, Alabama, in May 1961. That month, the Freedom Ride movement began with interstate buses driving into the Deep South to challenge segregation that persisted despite recent Supreme Court rulings. In some cities, the activists were arrested and brutally beaten.*

of what we called sit-ins. I emerged as one of the student leaders. I literally grew up on a lunch counter stool when I was 19 years old in 1959.

Later in 1960, we started sitting in on a regular basis, and I got arrested and went to jail. That was a great triumph because jail sort of became a way out. I grew up at a time in the American South when young blacks were not supposed to come in contact with the law. You were supposed to stay out of jail. But there was something redemptive about going through this process. I remember being beaten and a lighted cigarette being put out in my hair and getting thrown

off a lunch counter stool before I was arrested. I had the power, because of my belief in Christian love and nonviolence, not to strike back.

JD: How about the first Freedom Ride? What were you trying to do there?

JL: On the Freedom Ride, we were out to test a decision of the U.S. Supreme Court outlawing segregation in the area of public transportation. It was an effort on the part of the 13 of us (7 whites and 6 blacks) to ride from Washington, D.C. to Jackson, Mississippi, and on to Louisiana. We were using all the public facilities, not just the bus, but the waiting rooms, the restrooms, the lunch counters.

I will never forget the night before we left. We had dinner at a local Chinese restaurant in Washington, D.C. I had never had Chinese food before. We were sitting there eating and someone said, "You should eat well tonight because this may be like the Last Supper." Little did we know that one of our buses would be burned. Later a group of us were beaten by an angry mob. I was left lying unconscious, bleeding, at a Greyhound bus station in Montgomery.

JD: What about the famous march from Selma? You were one of the leaders on that Sunday, March 7, 1965. As you led the march of about 600 people across the Edmund Pettus Bridge, you were met by a whole flank of U.S. police and they beat you severely. What happened that day and what was the outcome of the Selma march?

JL: The Selma march was an attempt to dramatize to the nation and to the world that people of color, not only in Selma but throughout the state of Alabama and throughout the South, wanted to participate in the democratic process. They wanted to register and vote.

When 600 of us marched through the streets and came to the apex of the Edmund Pettus Bridge, we saw a sea of blue, Alabama state troopers. They told us that this was an unlawful march, that we should disperse and go back to the church. Less than a minute later, they cried "Troopers advance!" They came toward us, beating us with night sticks, bull whips, tramping us with horses, and using tear gas.

I was at the head of the march, as one of the march leaders, and I was hit in the head with a night stick and had a concussion. That was

*You were supposed to stay out of jail. But there was something redemptive about going through this process.*

*Continued on next page*

## Lost Interview, Now Found

the turning point, because there was a sense of righteous indignation. People saw nonviolent people being beaten. We weren't armed with guns or sticks. Some of us had knapsacks with an apple, an orange, some books, the Bible. We were bearing witness to something that we thought was right. We all were committed to the philosophy and discipline of nonviolence. That day became known as "Bloody Sunday."

JD: As you know so well, part of the challenge of nonviolence is to respond nonviolently to personal assault, but to keep insisting on the truth of justice and peace. Jesus epitomized this and Gandhi taught us this. How did you respond personally to these police who were beating you and to all the people who threatened you during those years in the struggle?

**JL:** Well, I believe in the philosophy and discipline of nonviolence. I accepted it not simply as a technique or as a tactic, but as a way of life, a way of living. You have to arrive at the point as believers in the Christian faith that in every human being you see a spark of divinity. Every human personality is something sacred, something special. We don't have a right to destroy that spark of divinity, that spark of humanity made and created in the image of God.

I saw Sheriff Clark in Selma or Bull Connor in Birmingham or George Wallace the governor of Alabama as victims of the system. We were not out to destroy these men. We were out to destroy a vicious and evil system.

JD: Unfortunately, most people, most Christians don't see Jesus as nonviolent, or God as a God of nonviolence and our faith calling us to uphold the sanctity of life through nonviolence. How do you understand Jesus and God in light of nonviolence?

**JL:** There's a verse in the Gospel, I think it's Matthew 10:34, where Jesus says, "Think not that I have come to bring peace but a sword." A lot of people like to interpret that to mean a physical sword and try to say that Jesus was making a justification for violence. But I believe he was talking about a spiritual warfare between what is good and what is evil, between what is right and what is wrong, or as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. would say, between the forces of light and the forces of darkness. I happen to believe that God is love, that love is God. I don't know how to explain it, but I somehow came to that point, as I grew in my faith.

JD: You had the privilege of working with so many people in the Civil Rights Movement, but especially with Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Can you tell me what you learned personally about nonviolence from Dr. King?

**JL:** I learned a great deal from Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. This man in his own way taught me that love in action is the strongest force, that nothing, nothing is more powerful than love in action. He taught me to have hope, not to give up, not to give in, and not to give out. I began to believe that maybe, just maybe, we could create the

*On Bloody Sunday, "I was hit in the head with a night stick and had a concussion. That was the turning point."*



*John Lewis leads marchers across the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, AL, on March 7, 1965.*

*Continued on next page*



King and Lewis (left) sing “We Shall Overcome” during a 1966 march from Memphis to Jackson, Mississippi. The gospel song’s lyrics derive from a 1901 hymn, “I’ll Overcome Some Day.” (Harry Benson / Contour / Getty)

Beloved Community.

JD: Dr. King was cut down in the prime of life; what would you say is his greatest legacy?

**JL:** I think his greatest legacy is that he taught us how to love, how to live, and really, how to die. You live your life by giving, by serving, by sharing and in the process, you don’t worry. You are consistent, you are true to your faith, to your belief. I often think about Dr. King, that if it hadn’t been for this man, I don’t know where our world would be today. I think he influenced so much in the American society and society around the world.

JD: Could you say a word about how you see nonviolent civil disobedience specifically as a tool in the struggle for social change?

**JL:** Nonviolent civil disobedience is a very powerful weapon. It’s probably one of the most powerful weapons that we have in the arsenal of nonviolent action because you’re literally putting your body on the line. You’re saying you’re willing to disobey a custom, a tradition, or what you consider an unjust law and you’re willing to pay the price, you’re willing to suffer, you’re willing to go to jail if necessary. There’s something redemptive about it, something cleansing.

JD: What’s it like for you personally having been arrested and jailed and now being in the House of Representatives?

**JL:** If someone had told me when I was sitting in at lunch counters, or on the Freedom Ride, or marching from Selma to Montgomery that one day I would be in Congress, elected by the good people of Georgia, I would have said you’re crazy; you don’t know what you’re talking about.

But, in a sense, it shouldn’t be strange for me. I believe that if you turn your life over to God Almighty and dedicate your life to service, then all this is an extension of my commitment to the philosophy of love and non-violence. Even in Congress, in committee meetings, I speak of love and the philosophy of nonviolence.

JD: In your opinion how can Christians use nonviolence to help to end war, end poverty, eradicate hunger, and abolish nuclear weapons?

**JL:** There are so many things we can do as Christians. We can lead the way as a nation. We can tell the leaders of our own country that there is a better way. I’ve said we can lay down the tools of war, and all the tools of violence. War is an obsolete tool of our foreign policy. Christians and all

*Rev. King  
“taught me to  
have hope, not  
to give up, not  
to give in, and  
not to give  
out.”*

*Continued on next page*



In this Feb. 15, 2011, photo, President Barack Obama presents the Presidential Medal of Freedom to Rep. John Lewis, D-Ga., during a ceremony in the East Room of the White House in Washington.

Carolyn Kaster | AP 2011

religious leaders have to tell our elected officials: “Let’s use our resources to end hunger and poverty, to find cures for the diseases that afflict humankind, to improve the standard of living and the quality of life for all people.”

JD: Can we support the death penalty?

JL: If you really believe that in every human being there is a spark of divinity, how can you kill anyone? We may have the judicial power to do that, but we don’t have the moral authority to do so. That should be left to God Almighty.

JD: As you know all too well, racism is alive and well in our country. What would you suggest to Christians, particularly to white Christians in our country, about turning to nonviolence and using nonviolence to fight the sin of racism?

JL: I think that all of us must use everything at our disposal to speak out against racism and bigotry. The scars and stains of racism are still deeply embedded in our society. When we acquiesce, when we’re silent, we’re helping racism to continue to prosper and grow. We should say that we are one family, one community, one house.

JD: How can we claim to want to disarm our streets when our government is still committed to such global violence?

JL: The government tends to send wrong messages to people. We tend to say to them, “Disarm, stop the killing, get rid of your guns,” and yet at the same time, we continue to arm people around the world, and we continue to engage in violence and war. How can we preach one thing and practice something else? Our foreign policy is a reflection of our domestic policy. We must not continue to use the tools of war and violence in our foreign policy.

JD: You would agree with Dr. King and others about the consistency of nonviolence all across the spectrum—no to violence on the streets and to the death penalty and to war and nuclear weapons and in our foreign policy.

JL: Yes. Nonviolence is one of those immutable principles that we cannot deviate from.

JD: What is your hope for future generations as we head into a new millennium?

JL: I’m very hopeful, very optimistic, that in the days and years to come, more and more people not only in America but around the globe will come to accept Christian nonviolence as a way of life, that somehow, humankind will evolve to a higher level where people will accept that violence and hate are too great a burden to bear, and that we will move to a new period in history where we will be quick to negotiate, to discuss, to solve our problems around a table rather than violently.

JD: What signs of hope have you seen to convince you that there is hope for the future?

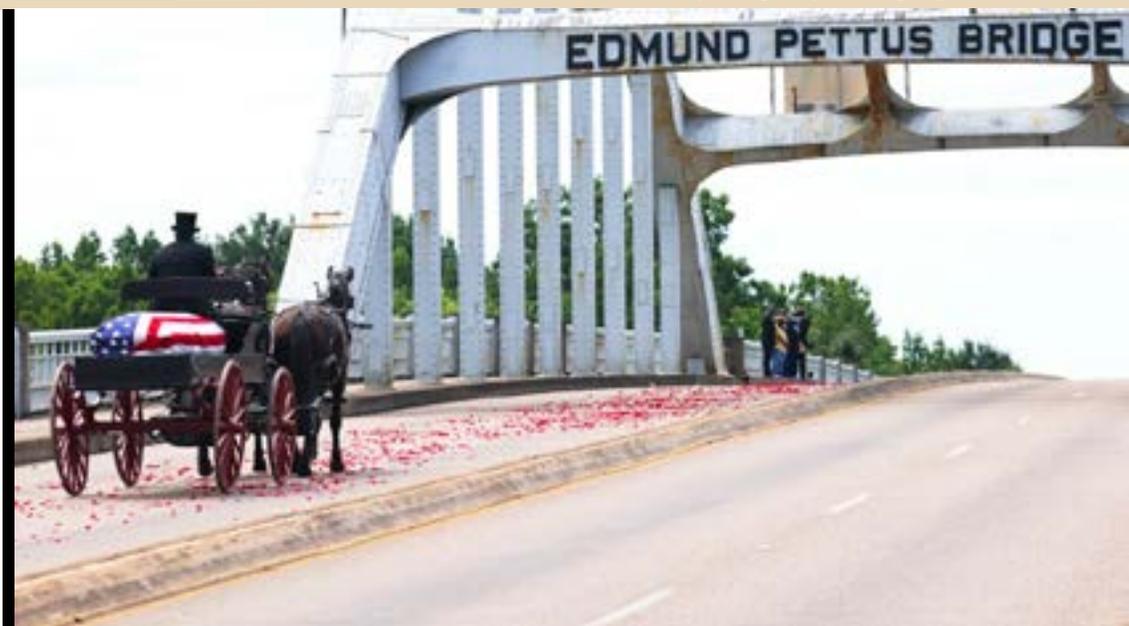
JL: I have seen a lot of changes in my lifetime. I have witnessed what I like to call “a nonviolent revolution” in our country. The signs that I saw growing up, saying “White” and “Colored,” are gone and they will not return. There was a tremendous amount of fear in the South, especially in the rural South, and that fear is gone. At one time, hundreds of thousands of people of color could not register and vote, could not participate in the democratic process. Today, they can register and vote.

In the South, less than thirty years ago, there

*Continued on next page*

*“Even in Congress, in committee meetings, I speak of love and the philosophy of nonviolence.”*

## Lost Interview, Now Found



*John Lewis's casket is led across the Edmund Pettus Bridge on July 26, 2020, more than 55 years after he crossed the bridge on Bloody Sunday.*

were only about fifty black elected officials. Today [in 1995] there are almost seven thousand. We made a lot of progress. We're not there yet, but I think we're on our way to the Beloved Community. There are going to be set-backs and disappointments along the way, but, as a nation and as a people, we're going to move toward the Beloved Community.

Christian nonviolence came from Jesus and was spread by Gandhi, but it has been picked up by many other different people and religions around the world. So, I'm hopeful, optimistic about the future.

JD: What would be your parting message to Christians, in light of your hope, your life, and your commitment to nonviolence, about how they might begin to practice nonviolence in their own lives and join in creating the Beloved Community?

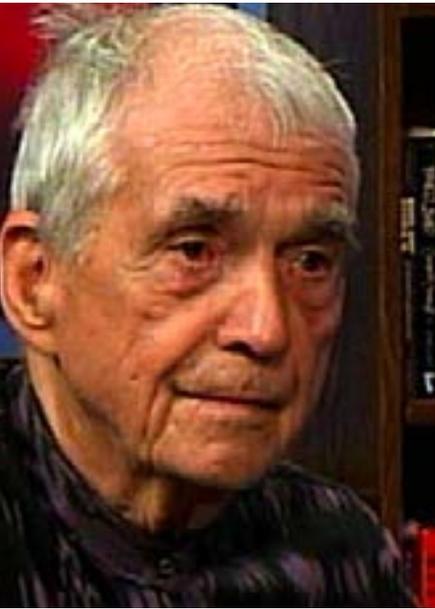
JL: I would say that we should all study and read everything we can about the philosophy of nonviolence and the power of love in action. You have to believe, and if you believe that God Almighty is involved in the affairs of humankind, then, in a real sense, we have to become agents who help God. The best way to help is to live the philosophy of love and nonviolence. That is the way forward, and the way out; and the way out will become the way in.

JOHN ROBERT LEWIS (1940–2020) was an American civil rights activist who chaired the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee from 1963–1966 and served in the U.S. House of Representatives for Georgia's 5th congressional district from 1987 until his death in 2020.

REV. JOHN DEAR has been arrested more than 85 times for nonviolent civil disobedience. He has spent nearly a year in jail, has traveled the warzones of the world, has spoken to over a million people about nonviolence, and has written forty books on that subject. Today, at 61, he is the executive director of the Beatitudes Center for the Nonviolent Jesus ([www.beatitudescenter.org](http://www.beatitudescenter.org)). He offers regular zoom workshops on nonviolence. Archbishop Desmond Tutu has nominated him for the Nobel Peace Prize. See [www.johndear.org](http://www.johndear.org)

## Views and Reviews of a Religious Radical

Patrick Henry



## Ways of Bringing Daniel Berrigan to Life

**E**leven years after Daniel Berrigan published his autobiography, *To Dwell in Peace*,<sup>1</sup> Murray Polner and Jim O'Grady published *Disarmed and Dangerous. The Radical Lives and Times of Daniel and Philip Berrigan*,<sup>2</sup> which remains, twenty-four years later, the only standard biography of either of the Brothers Berrigan. Polner and O'Grady did the hard research and presented the facts from the birth of the two radical priests until 1997 when Dan and Phil were still actively involved in antiwar and anti-nuclear weapons activities.

Our two biographers concentrate on the facts in the lives of the Berrigan brothers: family bloodlines, early life in Minnesota and Syracuse, New York, seminary studies, political awakenings, important influence of Dorothy Day, Thomas Merton and Thich Nhat Hanh, involvement in the Civil Rights Movement and anti-Vietnam War adventures, the trial in Catonsville, underground activities, prison, anti-nuclear activities and, as regards Dan, his work with cancer patients at St. Rose's Home and with AIDS patients at Saint Vincent's Hospital in Manhattan.

Polner and O'Grady interviewed several hundred people including the Berrigan brothers and their extended families. They read unpublished letters and papers from more than two dozen archives. They arranged and presented their materials in a strict chronological framework. Theirs is an in-depth biographical study of two social and political radicals and their impact on mid-20<sup>th</sup> century American society. Except for maintaining the religious motivation behind their activities and an occasional reference to Dan's isolation within the Jesuits and the Catholic Church, there are very few attempts to seize the inner man in either case. Their main focus was on the actions of the radical priests and the impact those actions had on their contemporaries.

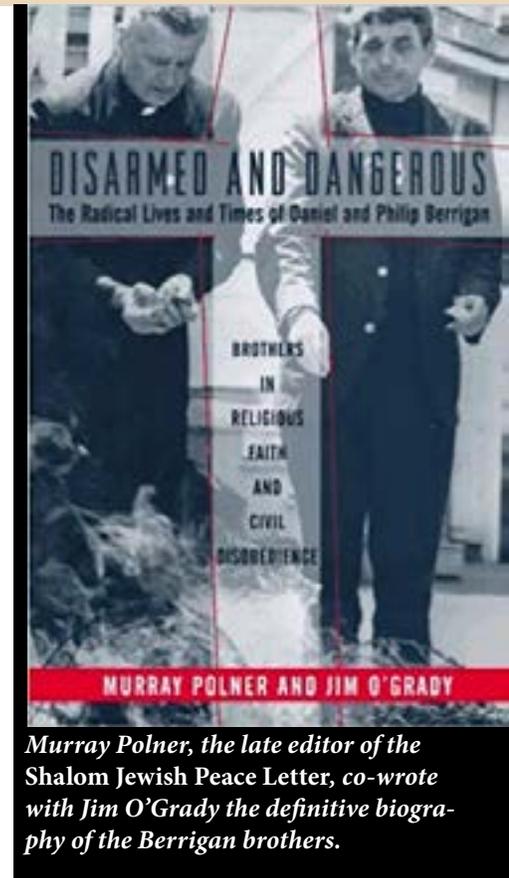
\*\*\*\*\*

In 2017, a year after Dan's death, his friend, Jim Forest, published *At Play in the Lions' Den. A Biography and Memoir of Daniel Berrigan*.<sup>3</sup> Like Polner and O'Grady, Forest relates Dan's life in a chronological narrative, accompanied by about 250 pictures, from his birth on May 9, 1921 to his death on April 30, 2016. Forest readily admits his debt to Polner and O'Grady: "Apart from Dan's own writing, their book helped me more than any other," he

1 Daniel Berrigan, *To Dwell in Peace: An Autobiography* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1986).

2 Murray Polner & Jim O'Grady, *Disarmed and Dangerous. The Radical Lives and Times of Daniel and Philip Berrigan* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1997).

3 Jim Forest, *At Play in the Lions' Den. A Biography and Memoir of Daniel Berrigan* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2017).



Murray Polner, the late editor of the Shalom Jewish Peace Letter, co-wrote with Jim O'Grady the definitive biography of the Berrigan brothers.

*Jim Forest's biography of Daniel Berrigan gives a complete, candid, intimate view of the whole person, not just the activist.*

Continued on next page

## Views and Reviews of a Religious Radical



*Daniel Berrigan's last arrest, Good Friday,  
at the "USS Intrepid" Museum, 2 April 2011.*

*Photo by Ananda Strazzini*

notes at the onset. Forest covers the same ground they did (childhood to 1997) but he also narrates the last 19 years of Dan's life. There is more in Forest's biography about Catholic thinkers and their importance in Dan Berrigan's initial formal training and in his later radical departures from orthodoxy. More too about the Catholic Peace Fellowship, the Catholic Worker, and the periodic struggles between the Brothers Berrigan. Forest also brings Dan's writings more to the forefront, especially his poetry and his books on the Hebrew prophets.

Jim Forest met Dan Berrigan in 1961. They worked together for peace for more than half a century. Jim's personal memories of Dan bring this biography to life and enable us to discover the whole person of Daniel Berrigan, not simply the political activist. Here we get the complete picture of the man behind the actions: the poet, the prophet, the priest, the man of "immense compassion," the friend ("I cannot ever recall Dan being in a hurry"). We get an intimate and candid view of Daniel Berrigan with first-hand knowledge on just about every page.

Some Jesuits considered Dan to be "in the order but not of it." Once, in the early 1970s, when Dan was living at Fordham University, he returned home from a talk he had given, and found that the lock of the building where he lived had been changed and his belongings were in boxes outside the building. No wonder Dan had written, with his impeccable wit: "If you want to follow Jesus, you better look good on wood."

But Dan was a joyful person. "I never knew anyone," writes Forest, "gladder to celebrate the Eucharist." This delight in the practice of his priesthood comes across when Forest describes Dan hearing his confession as they walk along W. 78<sup>th</sup> Street at midnight.

Dan said mass in English facing the people long before Vatican II. He stuck to his principles through the worst trials. Never would he abandon his "lifelong refusal to use death as a means of improving our world." Like Dorothy Day, he lived and died in used clothing. He owned nothing.

But he knew how to have a good time. He was a gourmet chef and enjoyed a couple of drinks at night. Jim Forest relates the good times Dan had on Block Island with his close friends, William Stringfellow and Anthony Towne. Earlier, when Dan moved into the West-side Jesuit Community on W. 98<sup>th</sup> Street and was showing Jim Forest his new digs, he pointed to a

well-stocked bar and quipped to Forest: "If this is poverty, bring on chastity."

\*\*\*\*\*

Last month saw the publication of Bill Wylie-Kellerman's *Celebrant's Flame. Daniel Berrigan in Memory and Reflection*.<sup>4</sup> Wylie-Kellerman (hereafter BWK) is a retired pastor, a Detroit Catholic Worker, and a longtime peace activist. Daniel Berrigan was his teacher, mentor, friend, and fellow peace worker for over forty years. BWK's book is not a biography of Daniel Berrigan. There is no chronological narration of Dan's life. The Polner and O'Grady biography is mentioned only once in a footnote that has nothing to do with biography.

In fact, BWK tells his readers: "If you don't know who Daniel Berrigan is, or know just

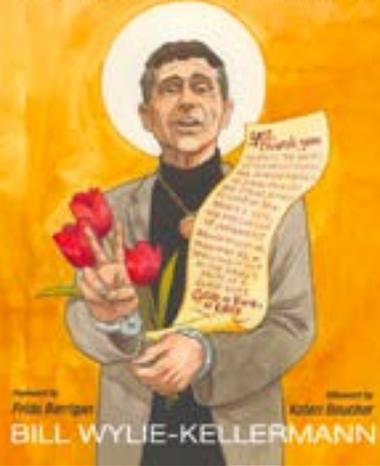
*Clothes don't  
make the  
man. Daniel  
Berrigan lived  
and died in  
used clothing.  
He owned  
nothing.*

<sup>4</sup> Bill Wylie-Kellerman, *Celebrant's Flame. Daniel Berrigan in Memory and Reflection* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2021).

*Continued on next page*

# Celebrant's FLAME

Daniel Berrigan in Memory and Reflection



Bill Wylie-Kellerman's recent book celebrates Daniel Berrigan as Teacher, Priest, Poet, Prisoner, Prophet, and more.

**PAT HENRY** is Cushing Eells Emeritus Professor of Philosophy and Literature at Whitman College in Walla Walla, WA. He is the author of *We Only Know Men: The Rescue of Jews in France during the Holocaust* (2007) and editor of *Jewish Resistance Against the Nazis* (2014). He has written about Dan Berrigan in the *National Catholic Reporter*, *Shalom*, *Commonweal*, *Journal for Peace and Justice Studies*, and *Sojourners Magazine*.

a little, start with chapter 1. Or maybe chapter 9. Otherwise, should you know of him, even perhaps know him well, start where you like. Any section might be a good way in."

Yet, Daniel Berrigan comes to life here beautifully as BWK arranges his text into the separate but simultaneous and overlapping parts of Dan's identity: Teacher, Brother, Priest, Poet, Prisoner, Prophet, Orderly of Nonviolence, Friend, and Contemplative.

Striking too, for me as reader, is BWK's oblique and poetic treatment of his subject matter. Take the chapter on The Priest, for example. It doesn't start with Dan's ordination and move progressively forward. Our author consistently eschews chronology in favor of metaphor and imagery. It begins with a poem by Dan that underscores the irony of "celibate father" and then deals with clothing. As if to enforce the proverb "Clothes don't make the man" (or more appropriately in French: "*L'habit ne fait pas le moine*;" Clothes don't make the monk.), BWK contrasts Dan in his coffin dressed in full priestly regalia with the Dan whom we all knew but never saw in vocational attire. This image creates an opening that allows BWK to describe how Dan conducted his priestly life. Dan's voice is omnipresent in this volume; here it ends the chapter in the form of a Berrigan Wedding Sermon.

The section on the Friend covers Dan's friendship with William Stringfellow and contains a letter from Stringfellow's friend, Jim Reale, who became a friend of Dan and a peace activist. The part dedicated to the Teacher emphasizes that, wherever Dan taught: "He wasn't so much teaching us to put more politics into our Scripture study, as he was urging us to put more biblical savvy into our politics." This section contains a letter from a former prisoner at the federal prison in Danbury, Connecticut about his classes with Dan.

Finally, the chapter on the Contemplative depicts in its richness how the divisions of Dan's person coexist simultaneously, overlap, and ultimately collapse. It begins with Dan's close friendship with Thich Nhat Hanh and then depicts Dan as an urban contemplative walking the streets of Manhattan, encountering and envisioning the faces of passersby as the beads of a rosary, each calling forth a prayer, "a moment to ponder the mysteries each person bore, sorrowful and joyful and glorious mysteries." This image links Dan to Dorothy Day and to the Thomas Merton of Fourth and Walnut Streets in Louisville. It leads BWK to evoke scenes of Dan in nature on Block Island and then to describe scenes of Dan in the various film he has appeared in: *In the King of Prussia* (1983), *The Mission* (1986), *Father Daniel Berrigan: The Holy Outlaw* (1970), and the still unreleased *The Berrigans: Devout and Dangerous*.

BWK succeeds wonderfully in achieving his goal: "to contribute to the fullness of [Dan's] blessed memory and to introduce him to a new generation." The attainment of that fullness is due in large measure to the multiplicity of voices heard within the text. These voices come to us in letters, homilies, speeches, lectures, scholarly papers, in prose and in various poetic forms. Together they constitute a communal chorus of testimony to the impact and importance of Dan's long life on all of us.

BWK's insightful, compelling, and passionate book begins with a moving preface by Dan Berrigan's niece, Frida Berrigan, who stresses the need for gentleness, wisdom, and friendship, and ends with an afterword by Kateri Boucher, a young community member in Detroit's Catholic Worker house, who urges us, as we finish reading, to look back on Dan's life, "not as a 'moral cipher'... but as a way of turning more fully to face the moment we are in."

*Looking back on Dan's life can give us "a way of turning more fully to face the moment we are in."*

—Daniel's niece,  
Frida Berrigan



## With Eyes of Compassion: Thich Nhat Hanh

*Interbeing:  
“We inter-are!”*

Jim Forest

*“Yesterday the Vietcong came through my village. Because of this my village was bombed — completely destroyed. Every soul was killed.”*

I first met Thich Nhat Hanh in May 1966.

At the time Lyndon Johnson was America’s president. The steadily rising level of U.S. troops in Vietnam reached 384,300 that year and within the next eighteen months would expand to half-a-million. But support for the war was shrinking. The nation had become deeply divided—never before had so many Americans opposed a war being fought by their own government. There were huge protest demonstrations in many cities. Conscientious objection was on the rise; thousands were refusing to serve in the military. Young men were burning their draft cards or crossing the border to Canada.

A significant part of the war’s opposition was religious. In America the ranks of protesters included many prominent Christians and Jews, while in Vietnam tens of thousands of Buddhists, many of them monks whose monasteries had been scarred by war, were engaged in anti-war activities. Display of the Buddhist flag had been banned. In 1963, one

leading Buddhist monk, Thich Quang Duc, had stunned the world when he burned himself alive in response to anti-Buddhist repression by the U.S.-backed Saigon government.

In July 1965, Al Hassler, executive secretary of the Fellowship of Reconciliation, had led a fact-finding mission to Vietnam that included meetings in Saigon with Buddhist leaders who had organized demonstrations that had been brutally attacked by South Vietnamese police. The monk who most impressed Hassler was the Zen master Thich Nhat Hanh. A friendship quickly took root between them that was to influence the rest of both men’s lives. Hassler wanted Nhat Hanh’s voice to be heard in America.

When I met Thich Nhat Hanh at the Fellowship of Reconciliation headquarters in Nyack, NY, he was thirty-nine and I was twenty-four. I had just been appointed director of the Fellowship’s Vietnam program while also serving as co-secretary of the Catholic Peace Fellowship.

In introducing him to the FOR staff, Al Hassler explained that Nhat Hanh was the leading figure in the development of “engaged Buddhism,” a movement of religious renewal that linked insights gained from Buddhist teaching to hands-on engagement in situ-

*Continued on next page*

*Interbeing:  
“We inter-are!”*

ations of suffering. He was a founder of Van Hanh University in Saigon and had played a leading role in efforts to bring the several strands of Vietnamese Buddhism into greater harmony, resulting in the creation of the Unified Buddhist Church. He was also the initiator of the School of Youth for Social Service, which prepared hundreds of young Vietnamese volunteers to serve in war-torn rural communities. In Vietnam he was a widely-read author though almost unknown outside his homeland. None of his twelve volumes of poetry or other writings had yet been published in English or other western languages.

This was not Nhat Hanh’s first visit to the United States. For nearly three years he had studied comparative religion at Princeton and lectured on Buddhism at Columbia University. His 1966 U.S. visit had been made possible by an invitation to speak at Cornell University.

Addressing the Fellowship staff, Nhat Hanh described the impact of the war on ordinary Vietnamese people, the obliteration of entire villages, and the actions of the Buddhist-led peace movement that allied itself with neither side. His stress was not on politics but on war-caused suffering. “The fact that the war kills far more innocent peasants than it does

*“The fact that the war kills far more innocent peasants than it does Vietcong is a tragic reality of life in the Vietnamese countryside.”*

Vietcong is a tragic reality of life in the Vietnamese countryside,” Nhat Hanh said. “Those who escape death by bombings are forced to abandon their destroyed villages and seek shelter in refugee camps where life is even more miserable than it was in the villages. In general these people do not blame the Vietcong for their plight. It is the men in the planes who drop death and destruction from the skies who appear to them to be their enemies. How can they see it otherwise?”

I was impressed not only by what Nhat Hanh had to say about his homeland but by his entire manner. He was as modest as the dark brown monastic robe he was wearing. When questions were raised, he looked at whomever he was addressing with alert, unhurried, attentive eyes. He spoke slowly, carefully, sparingly in Vietnamese-flavored English. His quiet voice

reminded me of wind bells. There were restful silences between words and phrases. Afterward I said to Al Hassler, “I could listen to this guy for hours even if he were reading aloud from a telephone book.” Al laughed. “Me too!”

I don’t recall Nhat Hanh speaking of “mindfulness” that day, a word with which his name would become firmly grafted, nor did it occur to me that his teaching would circle the world, important not only to his fellow Buddhists but to many Christians and Jews, plus people who attached no religious labels to themselves. It certainly didn’t cross my mind that he would become a widely read author whose books would sell in the millions of copies. At the time, I saw him not as a religious teacher but as a peace advocate. I left the meeting deeply impressed, aware that this humble monk from Vietnam was the sort of person who changes lives.



*Thich Nhat Hanh travelled to the U.S.A to call for peace in 1966.*

*Continued on next page*

## Interbeing: “We inter-are!”

At the end of his informal talk, Nhat Hanh recited one of his poems:

*Listen to this:*

*Yesterday the Vietcong came through my village.  
Because of this my village was bombed — completely destroyed.  
Every soul was killed.  
When I come back to the village now, the day after,  
There is nothing to see but clouds of dust and the river, still flowing.  
The pagoda has neither roof nor altar,  
Only the foundations of houses are left.  
The bamboo thickets have been burned away.*

*Here in the presence of the undisturbed stars,  
In the invisible presence of all the people still alive on earth,  
Let me raise my voice to denounce this filthy war,  
The murder of brothers by brothers!  
I have a question: Who pushed us into this killing of one another?*

*Whoever is listening, be my witness!  
I cannot accept this war,  
I never could, I never shall.  
I must say this a thousand times before I am killed.*

*I feel I am like that bird which dies for the sake of its mate  
Dripping blood from its broken beak, and crying out:  
Beware! Turn around to face your real enemies —  
Ambition, violence, hatred, greed.*

*Men cannot be our enemies — even men called “Vietcong”!  
If we kill men, what brothers will we have left?  
With whom shall we live then?*

In the question period, I asked Nhat Hanh if a monk’s self-immolation is approved of in Buddhist tradition. “While the world press speaks of it as suicide,” he responded, “in essence it is not. What Thich Quang Duc was aiming at when he burned himself three years ago was to move the hearts of the oppressors and call the attention of the world to the suffering being endured by the Vietnamese people, most of whom are Buddhists. To burn oneself is to prove that what one is saying is of the utmost importance. By burning himself, the monk is saying with all his strength that he can endure the greatest suffering in order to protect his people. To express his will by self-immolation is not to commit an act of despair or destruction but to perform an act of construction — to suffer and to die for the sake of one’s people. This is not suicide.”

I also asked him about his name. “I was born with a different name, Nguyen Xuan Bao,” he responded. “Your family name comes first. ‘Nguyen’ is my family name and ‘Xuan Bao’ the name I was given at birth, but when you are ordained as a monk you receive a new name. ‘Thich’ is the Vietnamese form of the Sanskrit family name of the Buddha. All Vietnamese monks are ‘Thich.’ My personal name, given to me when I was ordained, is ‘Nhat Hanh.’ It means ‘one action.’” Forty-six years later, I think I know what that one action is: it is simply to live attentively in the present moment, awake to suffering, awake to joy.

*“Find ways to be with  
those who are suffering,  
including personal  
contact, visits, images,  
and sounds.”*

*Continued on next page*



Thich Nhat Hanh teaching children in Plum Village, Summer 2014.

“Forgetfulness is a big problem,” he commented, “forgetting to be mindful from moment-to-moment, forgetting to be grateful for each step we take on earth, for each breath of air, forgetting the suffering of starving children, forgetting the devastation of war, forgetting our interconnectedness with all life and thus our collaboration in that suffering.” The cure for forgetfulness, he added, is mindfulness. “Mindfulness practice has the immediate result of making us feel happy in the present moment. If we are not happy and serene and peaceful, how can we expect the world to become happy and serene and peaceful?”

### INTERBEING

In 1966, shortly before his exile from Vietnam, Thich Nhat Hanh had formed the Tiep Hien Order—the Order of Interbeing. Its initial six members, all board members of the School of Youth for Social Service, were the forerunners of what he called “engaged Buddhism.”

While staying in Fontvannes, Nhat Hanh asked me to help him make a translation of the Order’s rule. With the Vietnamese text in hand, he read it to me in his own English. I wrote down what he said, then polished it lightly while trying to preserve his voice. Nhat Hanh then produced a corrected version. The method wasn’t ideal but he was pleased.

One of the Order’s fourteen rules disarmed all who took the vows: “Do not kill. Do not let others kill. Find whatever means possible to protect life and prevent war.” Another required day-to-day mindfulness of the suffering of others: “Do not avoid contact with suffering or close your eyes before suffering. Do not lose awareness of the existence of suffering in the life of the world.

Find ways to be with those who are suffering, including personal contact, visits, images, and sounds. By such means, awaken yourself and others to the reality of suffering in the world.”

I asked him about the term “interbeing.”

“It means,” he said, “that each is in the other. Between us there is no border. In Buddhism we have a term that means inter-penetration, but I prefer interbeing. Inter-penetration presupposes that there is a border between us but that we can create a door. Interbeing means the door is already there and was always there. We inter-are!”

I was reminded of a similar affirmation in the writings of Thomas Merton. In a letter to Amiya Chakravarty, an Indian philosopher, poet and scholar, Merton wrote, “We all stand on the hidden ground of love.” And while speaking at an inter-religious congress in India shortly before his death in 1968, Merton said, “The deepest level of communication is communion. It is wordless. It is beyond words, and it is beyond speech, and it is beyond concept. Not that we discover a new unity. We discover an older unity. My dear brothers [and sisters], we are already one. But we imagine that we are not. What we have to recover is our original unity. What we have to be is what we are.”



*The term “interbeing” means, “that each is in the other. Between us there is no border.”*

**JIM FOREST** is the author of biographies of Dorothy Day, Thomas Merton, and Daniel Berrigan.

His reflections on Thich Nhat Hanh are drawn from his recently published *Eyes of Compassion: Living with Thich Nhat Hanh* (Maryknoll, NY: Obis Books, 2021).

## Israel & The Middle East

Tal Kra-Oz

# What Happens If You Refuse to Serve in the IDF?

**O**n an unseasonably warm afternoon this winter, I met with Hallel Rabin in Tel Aviv's Sarona neighborhood. It was the cusp of Israel's third countrywide lockdown, and the restaurants and cafes that populate the former Templar village were limited to serving takeout. Throngs of soldiers from the Kirya—the IDF's headquarters across the street—picnicked around us.

Rabin is not related to the late prime minister. She is 19 and reminds me of many women I met over the course of my military service: the sharp-as-nails instructor who taught me how to fire an M72 antitank rocket in basic training, or the young officer who quietly commanded a room full of female soldiers charged with remotely monitoring the video feeds from security cameras along the Gaza border. But Rabin chose a very different role for herself.

Both of her parents served in the army: her mother as an officer and her father as a tank commander. Her older sister is nearing the end of her service. "I wasn't brought up to be rebellious or anything like that. But I was taught to make my own decisions and to take responsibility for them," she told me, as we sat outside in the sun. "My mom teaches civics, and current events were a big part of my life from a young age. Questions about violence, about the [Palestinian] territories, what our actions mean, and how they affect others. If bad things were done to us not so long ago, how come we can

*"I was taught to make my own decisions and take responsibility for them."*

*—19-year-old conscientious objector Hallel Rabin.*

do terrible things? It seemed so unfair. It was kids' talk, but it was there."

After graduating from high school last summer, Rabin was scheduled to enlist in the IDF a few weeks later. But on Aug. 24, her scheduled recruitment date, she told the army authorities that she was a pacifist and refused to enlist. She was promptly tried and jailed. In late November, after four stints in military prison—a total of 56 days behind bars—Rabin was finally recognized as a conscientious objector and discharged. Since then, she's been back home with her family in the village of Harduf, a former kibbutz in the Jezreel Valley near Haifa, where



*Hallel Rabin, a 19-year-old Israeli conscientious objector, poses for a picture outside the 'No. 6' military prison near Atlit in northern Israel on Nov. 20, 2020, upon release from jail for refusing to serve in the Israeli army.* EMMANUEL DUNANDE/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

*Continued on next page*



**Tamar Alon, left, and Tamar Ze'evi were arrested after they refused to enlist in the Israeli military, citing objections to the IDF's activities in the West Bank.**

she works on a horse farm that doubles as a workshop for adults with special needs.

Most young Israelis who share at least some of Rabin's qualms about military service choose to grin, bear it, and enlist nonetheless, whether because they realize that an army is a necessary evil in today's Middle East, or the belief that they can have a positive influence in their service. The IDF is hardly colored by the conservative bent common among many American veterans, as evidenced by the outspoken dovishness of its many retired generals (MK David Bitan, the former coalition chair from Likud, famously remarked that security chiefs "all become leftists" during their careers).

Those who are repulsed by the occupation, or who see themselves as constitutionally incapable of military service, or who simply think they have better things to do with their time, typically opt for another route. According to the

IDF, almost 12% of candidates for military service in 2020 were granted a full exemption for reasons of mental health. Some, if not most, of the thousands of people represented by those figures no doubt suffer from mental illness. But receiving a mental health exemption is notoriously easy, allowing the IDF to accommodate the desires of a growing number of young draft dodgers, while granting plausible deniability to all parties.

Lying to a mental health officer was never an option for Rabin, she told me. "I wasn't going to say that something is wrong with me, when what's actually wrong is everything else," she said. As high school approached—and with it the series of pre-recruitment interviews and tests that keep Israeli teens busy—she began to research conscientious objecting. She contacted Mesarvot, an organization that supports conscientious objectors. She discovered that it was a rare and difficult status, one that only a handful of people attempt to receive every year, but that it was also her legal right—provided that she could prove that she was the real thing.

In her senior year of high school, Rabin wrote a series of letters to the IDF Recruitment Bureau requesting a hearing with the so-called Conscience Committee tasked with granting or denying her exemption. She didn't receive a response. After refusing to enlist on recruitment day, Rabin was finally brought before the committee.

The Conscience Committee, composed of four officers and a civilian academic, has the job of making the often hairsplittingly fine distinctions between those who refuse to serve for political reasons—say, the occupation—and "genuine" pacifists who would just as soon refuse to serve in the Swiss Armed Forces. The latter are exempt from serving, while the former are not. A hearing before the committee has many of the trappings of a legal procedure, but no legal counsel is allowed to be present.

"Am I refusing to serve because I was brought up that way, or did I make that choice on my own? If I use words like 'occupation' or 'government policy' then they'll see me as a political objector, someone who refuses to serve because of concrete actions taken by *our* army. If not for the occupation then they'd serve," Rabin said. "But my refusal is because of my objection to all violence. Not because of objection to the occupation, which is just

*IDF security chiefs  
"all become leftists."*

*—Former Likud chair Bitan.*

*Continued on next page*



**Conscientious objector Matan Helman was discharged from the Israeli army on Thursday after six stints in prison adding up to a total of 110 days behind bars. The official reason for his discharge: Bad, grave behavior. Photo by Edo Ramon/Mesarvot**

one of many forms of violence. No, I wouldn't serve in the Swiss army either, because I object to the essence of any military, to all violence. When our army is so active, and our reality is so violent, that supports my argument, but it is not the root of it."

Before meeting with the committee, Rabin had already made peace with the fact that she would be spending time in prison. "Optimistically my chances were 50-50, but realistically I knew it was more like 70-30," she said. "For some people, prison is the goal. They say, 'my refusal is political, and I'm going to prison to make a statement.' But I made a real effort to convince them that I was a true conscientious objector. I wasn't successful."

Her exemption denied, Rabin was sentenced to military prison for her refusal to serve—and given a new recruitment date. She spent most of her time in prison in a square concrete cell with five bunk beds, a toilet, shower, and two sinks. "It was a very strange, intense experience," she said. "You have no freedom but plenty of free time. Cellphones aren't allowed, so I read a lot, and talked a lot with the other girls. You make plenty of special connections, because no matter where you're from and why you're there, whether or not you're even serving in the army, everyone has the same exact status. You have nowhere else to go."

She spent the ensuing weeks in and out of prison: refusing to enlist on her new recruitment date, being sent to another stint in prison for that refusal, being released but refusing to enlist once again. Finally, after 46 days

in prison, she was called to appear before the appellate Conscience Committee.

"I was sick of having to explain myself over and over again and being sent back to prison and meeting new girls," she said. "So I was determined to make my case. But the second hearing was even more difficult—aggressive and probing and skeptical. 'You say you're a law-abiding citizen but you're also a draft dodger. How can that be?'" After Rabin left the room, exhausted, her mother appeared before the committee as a character witness, attesting to her daughter's philosophy of nonviolence.

Rabin herself returned to prison. By then she was used to the 5:15 reveille, followed by 20 minutes of washing up and putting on her uniform, and to the hours hanging out in her cell punctuated by roll calls and cleaning, canteen time, and meals. "By then I already knew the staff well, and they knew me," she said. "They would joke around with me and make sure I was doing all right. They congratulated me after they saw an interview I had given. And that was nothing compared to the support from the other prisoners. Those are girls whose opinions are the polar opposite of mine, but they respected me for acting on my beliefs and paying the price."

Awaiting the committee's verdict, Rabin began to mentally prepare for her backup plan. If her exemption was denied again, she knew that after another 30 or 40 days in prison she'd be called to appear before yet another committee, this one charged with determining her incompetence to serve. Her predecessors who had failed to receive the coveted conscientious imprimatur were all eventually released from military service for "bad behavior" that made them incompetent to serve. "A soldier stubborn enough to spend 90 days in prison to avoid serving is guilty of very bad behavior," she told me. She found that prospect mildly offensive. "I was a model soldier in prison. I was on my best behavior."

Ten days after Rabin's appeal was heard, her fourth prison sentence ended. She

*Hallel Rabin spent four prison sentences while seeking and appealing for a conscientious objector exemption.*

*Continued on next page*



*The Israeli army discharged conscientious objector Ayelet Brachfeld after imprisoning her for 100 days.*

collected her mobile phone from the prison offices and saw the text message she had been waiting for.

When all else fails, the IDF can still be relied on to make our cognitive dissonances more palatable, to accommodate pacifists in a country that is still very much in need of a military, and to narrow the gaps between the stories that Israelis tell themselves and the cold, hard truths that govern our lives. So while the draft is mandatory in Israel, and the IDF is nominally a people's army, the majority of 18-year-olds do not serve. All Arab citizens are informally exempt; Haredim are in practice, and Orthodox women are allowed to file for religious exemptions. The mental health exemptions are a relatively easy out for everyone else.

I asked Rabin what she thought about those who opted for a less circuitous route out of military service. "If you have an ideology or something to say about our reality, our country, you've got to own it. Take responsibility, pay the price," she said. "You oppose the system, but you choose the option that is most convenient for it? A mental health exemption is very easy for the army to digest. But the mirror that conscientious objectors hold up to the army doesn't suit them at all."

While her family and friends were supportive, as were well-wishers from around the world, many Israelis have taken to cursing Rabin online. Real-life acquaintances are more diplomatic, she said. "They keep telling me that our army is the most moral army in the world," she explained.

"But an army is immoral by definition. In such a violent reality, the solution isn't more violence. The contribution that I can make to society is to talk about this, to present an alternative that is legal and legitimate. I can't even count how many times I've explained to officers what a Conscience Committee is, that pacifism is a legal right recognized by the Supreme Court, that our Declaration of Independence says that the State of Israel will guarantee freedom of conscience. I'm willing to speak with anyone willing to listen and explain myself again and again, but I won't shut up just because some people don't like what I have to say."

The right not to serve in the military might win more hearts if it were framed as the right to serve in a nonmilitary setting.

Civilian National Service exists in Israel, but it is open only to those exempt from serving in the IDF. Rabin told me that she's planning to sign up. In her junior year of high school, she spent a week volunteering at a domestic violence shelter in Jerusalem. Now she's considering volunteering there for two years of National Service. Another option is an organic farm that provides training and support to teenage dropouts.

Before we said our farewells, I told Hallel Rabin about the many occasions during my time in the army that I knew my presence had helped prevent a bad outcome, and

about the dozens of soldiers and officers that I knew personally and could always count on to do the right thing. "I asked myself that question for a very long time," she said. "Can I do more from within the system? I was offered plenty of good options. Combat roles and tech units. And I knew that I'd be a good fit, too. But that would have been too easy," she explained. "And so if I have the option and the power to realize my worldview in a big way, and make some noise, I'll go with that. And you know what? I came out all right, in the end. I'm going to be OK."

*The right not to serve in the military might win more hearts if framed as the right to serve in a nonmilitary setting.*

**TAL KRA-OZ** is a writer based in Tel Aviv.

This story originally appeared in *Tablet* magazine, at [tabletmag.com](http://tabletmag.com), and is reprinted with permission.