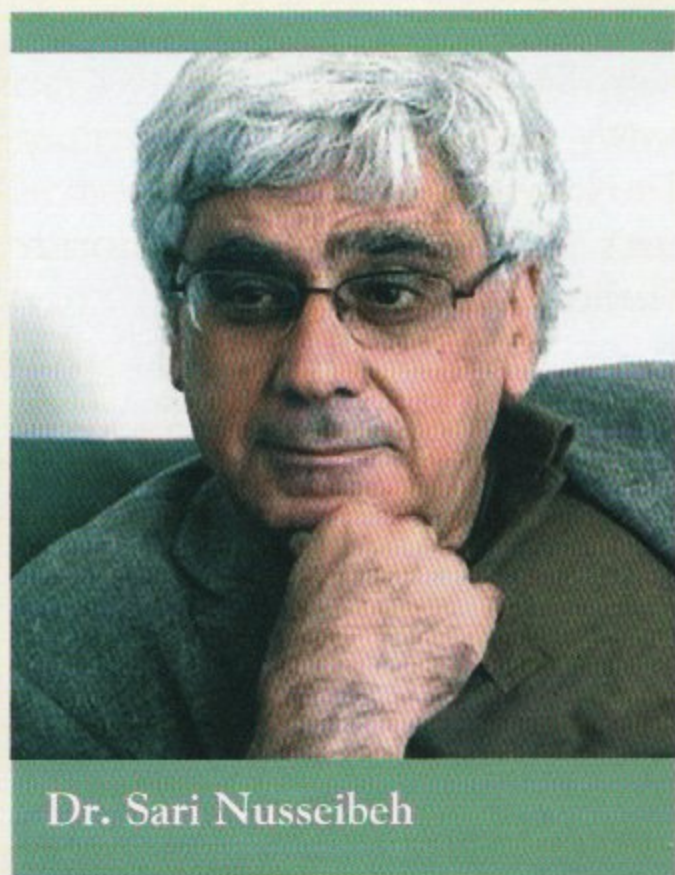


Interview with

Professor

Sari Nusseibeh

by Judith Laurance



Dr. Sari Nusseibeh

Dr. Sari Nusseibeh is professor of Islamic philosophy, president of Al-Quds University, former PLO representative in Jerusalem, and co-author of the People's Voice initiative to build grassroots support for a two-state solution.

"Al-Quds is life itself for more than 10,000 undergraduate and postgraduate students who come from all over Palestine to study in Jerusalem."

Q. Professor Nusseibeh, What do you see as the responsibilities

of the academic institution in a conflict situation?

As well as the responsibilities that all universities have, there are three particular basic challenges that we face in this context. The first is survival. I have 30 years' experience of universities under occupation, and the main thing is to stay afloat.

Secondly, whilst staying afloat, we as Palestinians must face the major challenge of not becoming dehumanized, losing our humanity.

And thirdly, we hope to help people see a way out of the conflict, by reaching agreement, finally finding their way to shore. This involves opening our eyes, not only to who we are, but to be aware of the "other." This is hard enough if we are considering faraway, distant peoples and cultures in Africa or Asia, but in our case, it means understanding the Israelis, right here.

It is much harder when the "other" is your enemy.

Q. In what ways does Al-Quds University create and sustain an ethos of conflict resolution?

My own sense is that we have to first work on ourselves. We encourage students and staff to resolve internal conflicts in ways that center on discussion and debate, reaching agreement by argument

that leads to decision making. We encourage this at all levels, from university council meetings to difficulties between individual students. This has nothing to do with the external conflict involving Israelis.

A recent example involved the admission of a student. There was disagreement amongst staff about the student's suitability under an entry policy that the council had implemented some years before. The dean of the department concerned was against using this policy in this particular situation on ethical grounds. I suggested that we obtain the point of view of each council member, and we found that there was a majority in favor of allowing entry to the student, in line with our policy. So the decision was made using democratic methods.

I am sometimes criticized for taking too long to reach a decision. I want never to be restricted by considerations of time. I restrict myself only by two people coming to an agreement. So, for instance, we once had a meeting of the university student council which went on for eight or nine hours before everyone got tired and finally reached agreement!

I think that by encouraging this atmosphere of debate and listening to the other person's point of view within the university, we have slowly created a culture of open-