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Explosive Wisdom: What Landmines Teach Us About Liberation and Leadership

Jerry White



Jerry White shares the 1997 Nobel Peace Prize

I had never thought much about landmines until I stepped on one in 1984, when I was twenty years old. I was camping in northern Israel with two friends and suddenly the earth exploded around me. I looked down at my shredded bloody legs in confused horror, wanting to know where my right foot had gone. Our hike had led us through an unmarked minefield left from the 1967 Arab-Israeli War.

Thus began my journey of discovering who I was and what was possible. It was the beginning of a life-long quest to do more than merely survive, but to dis-

cover the inherent power of resilience that can lead each and every one of us to greater wisdom, understanding and knowledge.

My personal evolution from landmine survivor to ‘transformational leader’ happened because I had to learn early in life how to dig deeper into myself—mind, heart, soul—to find out who I really was and what I wanted to accomplish in the life I still had. More importantly, I learned that surviving and leading are collective experiences that require the support of others. No one can do it alone. I began to seek out teachers and mentors who had discovered deeper meaning and understanding of themselves, whether through trauma or accrued life experience. These role models were generous in spirit, pointing me toward a physical and spiritual recovery that I came to think of as my liberation. It was not a singular or solo experience but an ongoing social process. Tapping the power of wisdom in a violently vulnerable world means relying on one other, working with integrity, *together*.

I believe transformation comes when individuals join forces to align their individual and collective wisdom, understanding and knowledge, not just for themselves, but for the good of all humanity.

This is the story of how I came to lead a small band of resilient survivors, activists and somewhat jaded politicians in a campaign to clean up thousands of minefields in Israel, Palestine and Jordan. The best part of the story is that it shows how it is still possible to lead meaningful large-scale change in the world today. And that each of us has a role to play, from the most powerful politician to a wounded eleven-year-old boy. We all can help liberate a planet stuck in destructive patterns of violent behavior and polarizing politics.

To give some context, there are tens of millions of landmines threatening innocent people in over 80 countries. The Middle East is called the ‘landmine heartland’ of the world because it is so heavily contaminated. Israel alone has up to one million mines buried from the Red Sea in the south up through the Arava Valley to the Dead Sea, and up through the Jordan Valley to the heavily infested Golan in the north. In 2009, Israel was invested in the idea that these mines were critical for their security, and they were simply not interested in giving them up. Truth be told, these mines had long ceased being useful for security and instead posed a threat to Israelis themselves, wounding innocent civilians, not soldiers or terrorists.

It is important to understand that our Campaign for a Mine-Free Israel was never just about landmines. One of our overreaching goals was to modernize and transform outdated military security frameworks into human security frameworks that would increase citizen and public safety. This systemic shift in thinking and policy would not only save lives, it would strengthen economies and increase prospects for cross-border development and peace. So the Campaign was also about reforming security frameworks. The old military model was ineffective and dangerous. The new citizen model was modern and empowered to protect community interests.

How does one shift consciousness from ‘must have’ to ‘must get rid of?’ What are the levers to catalyze change in human thought and behavior? What qualities of leadership are needed to create the space for transformation to manifest? What does liberation look and feel like?

I believe leaders of transformation must align three core elements in order to manifest a system-level change that unlocks previously intractable problems. Successful leaders must learn to: (1) source the power of their inner **wisdom**, anchoring themselves in their values, not just personal interests; (2) seek the **understanding** of the underlying complexities and behavior patterns that contribute to harmful spirals, and discern and work toward healthier



Princess Diana traveled with survivors Jerry White (right) and Ken Rutherford (left) to Bosnia-Herzegovina in August 1997

alternatives; and (3) use **knowledge** and know-how to deliver measurable results, offering everyone a way to contribute, to pick up a shovel and dig.

Simply put, liberation comes from aligning *who* we are at our best with *how* we think at our best and *what* we do at our best. It sounds pretty basic, but it's surprising how many talented individuals are misaligned in their approaches to life and work. Often without realizing it, leaders leak energy by splintering and compartmentalizing pieces of their lives. They end up running on the empty fumes of anger and ego, rather than accruing the energy needed to fuel and sustain the common good.

One common trap for leaders is to over-exercise one of their gifts at the expense of others. Is there such a thing as being too smart, too understanding, too wise? Well, yes, if one element is being pushed to its limits without the healing balm of balance and rest.

Having worked with hundreds of leaders from diverse cultures over the past twenty years, it seems to me that most of them demonstrate very strong expertise and prowess in one or two of the three critical elements needed for liberation. *Knowledge* is usually the dominant strain. One or two elements can forge short-term progress, but all three cylinders revving simultaneously is what sustains transformation. Liberation only comes when healthy leaders actualize wisdom plus understanding plus

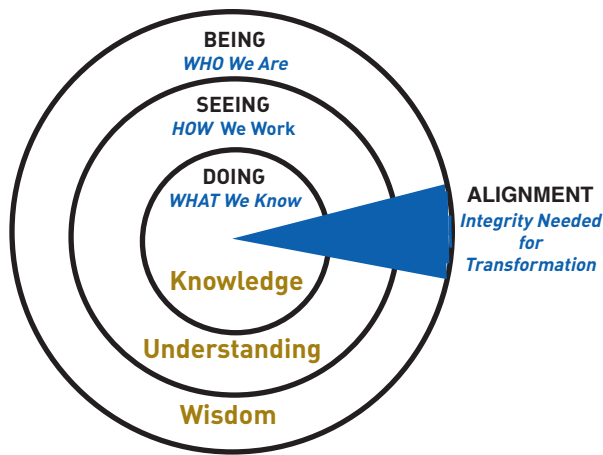
knowledge. The good news is that no one person has to contain all three. Wisdom emerges as we each take steps forward in strategic action, collectively.

Wisdom, born of a deep reverence for life, unleashes our inherent resilience, potential and power, and helps replace fragmentation with unity, shortsightedness with vision, and fear with courage.

It's admirable to have a vision of transformation, something good that we want to achieve in the world or in our own lives. But visions fail when they are bound up in the force of a charismatic personality and not grounded in the wisdom of universal and transcendent values. Wisdom is often found missing in modern leadership. Leading from the soul—not just the head (brain-power) and heart (emotional intelligence)—will tap into the power to deliver sustainable results. Wisdom is fundamentally about *who* you are at your core, beyond title, personal passion, social identity, skillset or CV.

When I first wanted to launch the *Mine-Free Israel Campaign*, it was 2004 and I thought I was more than ready. I had already practiced my landmine leadership on a global scale. I had worked closely with Diana, Princess of Wales, and celebrated with my colleagues in Oslo, Norway, the 1997 Nobel Peace Prize awarded to our International Campaign to Ban Landmines. We had helped

LIBERATION LEADERSHIP



Breakthrough change requires that social entrepreneurs learn how to align their Wisdom, Understanding and Knowledge. Our goal as leaders is to align what we do, how we do it, and who we are.

Inner Circle: In this space of “Doing,” we apply know-how and skills to solve technical problems and achieve results. — **Knowledge**

Middle Circle: In this space of “Seeing,” we recognize patterns in order to create alternatives for thought and behavior. — **Understanding**

Outer Circle: In this space of “Being,” we learn to recognize and trust our inherent power for resilience and creativity. — **Wisdom**

WISDOM is essential but too often missing in modern leadership. Leading from the soul of our deepest awareness and core values will tap into transformative power to deliver lasting results.

negotiate an innovative treaty to ban anti-personnel mines, now signed by 159 countries. In 1998, Her Majesty Queen Noor of Jordan had become the new international patron of Landmine Survivors Network (an organization I co-founded in 1995 with another American survivor, Ken Rutherford). At that time, King Hussein of Jordan pledged to ban all future landmine use, to destroy stockpiles within four years, and to clear the Jordan River Valley of mines within ten years. (Sadly, the King passed away just as the Mine Ban Treaty entered into force and didn’t live to see Jordan accomplish this worthy goal in 2012.) I thought these credentials along with my personal experiences would be enough to get Israel to take action. After all, I had the *knowledge* of how to get this done.

Wrong. Unfortunately, I did not yet have the *wisdom* or *understanding*.

Israel is one of the toughest countries I have worked in, beating Bosnia-Herzegovina, Ethiopia, Vietnam and Colombia...*combined*. There’s a saying about Israel that it’s just like any other country, only *more* so. It wasn’t enough for me to have studied Jewish history and Hebrew, nor to have shared scar tissue and limb loss locally. When it comes to barrier-busting shifts bringing about fundamental change of thought and behavior—*what matters more than street cred is who you are at your core and what you*

are communicating in the present moment. What I was conveying during our first stab at changing Israel’s defense policy was too much my own personal crusade to ‘clean up Israel.’ I held a handful of perfunctory meetings with mid-level officials at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Jerusalem and then at the Defense Ministry in Tel Aviv. I spoke forthrightly about how Israel was ten years behind most other countries when it came to the landmine issue. I recounted my personal experience in 1984 and announced with some bravado how I was now ready to help Israel address this gap, to engage in this fight for what was right (as if the country had been awaiting my return!). Upon reflection, the energy and vocabulary were all wrong. Note to self: ‘crusader’ energy, whether medieval or modern in manifestation, never ends well.

“*Lama-mi-ata?*” asked one irritated Israeli Colonel: “Why-Who-Are-You?” It’s a saying that implies something like, who made YOU the boss of me anyway? My naïve ideas of preparing a media campaign to publicize their Holy Land as a Deadly Land, including a *60 Minutes* and *Vanity Fair* partnership, wasn’t exactly viewed as friendly fare. “This type of activism never turns out well for Israel. We will be slammed in the international media. Forget it.” As I got up to go with my well-meaning American tail between my legs, the same colonel asked another pointed question; this one cut to the quick: “Jerry, are you ready to do this in a way that is *not* about you? Something more low key that will take several years of quiet work and patience?” *Patience?* I thought there wasn’t time to be patient. This was clearly a ‘wrong’ that urgently needed to be made ‘right.’ But, the Defense establishment in Israel was not inclined to work with individuals or civil society, and they certainly were under no obligation to listen to *me*, some naïve American tourist injured on an ill-advised camping trip two decades prior.

So early on, in round one, I misfired. I had not thought through my own motivations as a leader—who I was going to *be* in the process of birthing change. I didn’t realize that, in order to be a credible leader, people must recognize *your* values as *their* values, drawing from the same fount of energy and wisdom. They will only do that if *who* you represent harmonizes with *how* you propose to communicate alternatives and *what* you propose to do. Alignment is critical.

It took a couple more years for me to tap into my own wisdom with generosity—in other words, making the issue about others, *their* vital interests and values, rather than about me and my wishful thinking. I didn’t possess the vocabulary to know what it meant to ‘tap into the power of wisdom’ until I participated in a leadership workshop at the University of Notre Dame’s Business School, co-taught by Dr. Monica Sharma and Professor Leo Burke. It was an eye-opener for me to hear others speak the language of large-scale systems change and global interdependence at a top US B-school no less. These wise teachers kept using phrases such as ‘finding grace in a competitive world’ and understanding ‘unity’ and ‘interdependence.’ Most executive education programs treat leadership as a skillset or toolbox. But



Queen Noor and Secretary of State Colin Powell with Jerry White (right) and Cambodian mine ban advocates

Notre Dame challenged its executives to dig deeper, beyond rudimentary discussions of social and emotional intelligence. Dr. Sharma challenged us: Who and what do you stand for as a leader? What qualities do you most admire in your heroes, and are you willing to bring those very qualities into your community, your workplace and home? If we, at our age and education level didn't yet know who we were and what we stood for then we might as well head back to our day jobs.

We were encouraged to examine the fundamental difference between corporate leadership and transformational global leadership; between improving shareholder value and effecting breakthrough change that will matter to the planet and the children of our great grandchildren. The difference is the presence of *Wisdom*, something indivisible that can never be owned by one individual or any group, let alone trademarked or branded. The essence of wisdom is transcendent, dynamic, spiritual, without being the exclusive franchise of any one person, religion or tradition. Wisdom cuts across borders, boundaries, and social, religious and national identities. That's why it is a great unifier and liberator.

By the time I returned to Israel in 2009 to re-launch a Mine-Free Israel Campaign, I arrived with a more humble and clear sense of what I could bring to the table—not cameras, not criticism, not angry activism, but a growing capacity to stand firmly in my own wisdom, magnifying the qualities I so admire in others: *Light. Wholeness. Liberation.* These big words reflect what I most admire in my heroes and mentors, and resonated strongly in the work ahead to free land and lives held hostage by minefields, real and

political. I was just learning to access the transcendent energy these concepts suggest. These weren't magic words, but more like a mantra of sorts to remind me of the positive energy we can inhabit in any boardroom or living room. These qualities humble rather than inflate me because they are not possessions, not *mine*. They can be accessed anytime anywhere by grace. Wisdom is about the essential spirit one brings to the matter at hand, rather than any personal DNA of a leader. This newfound realization was to become especially critical for political outreach in the Israeli Knesset, where there is no shortage of fractious debate, suspicion and political cynicism.

Before meeting the key decision-makers—from Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, or Defense Minister Ehud Barak, or his Deputy Matan Vilnai, to the Opposition Leader Tzipi Livni and her Kadima party colleague, Tzachi Hanegbi, then Chair of the powerful Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee—I wanted our Mine-Free Campaign to be very clean and clear. We would look each and every individual straight in the eye as a human being created equal in dignity and rights. There would be no old-school advocacy 'throwing of ketchup' to stain reputations with shame-and-blame tactics that divide the sheep from the goats, the angels from demons. "All is One," as His Holiness the Dalai Lama reminded me. We would assume there was inherent greatness and resilience in each politician, and we would remain absolutely neutral regarding their personal politics or past history. After all, we were after hearts, minds and *votes*. To pass mine clearance legislation would require approval from the top brass as well as support from a majority of Knesset members across all parties, from the far right to the far left.



Jerry White in Addis Ababa with Ethiopian child survivors

Before meeting Tzachi Hanegbi, I was told he'd be a cool customer, tough and calculating, as he sized me up. I invited him for an afternoon coffee in the lobby of a seaside Tel Aviv hotel. "What do you want?" was his pointed question. It seemed abrupt, at least to this American who prefers to warm up a bit more relationally, "Where are you from? How's the family?" But Hanegbi was there on business. His demeanor, with arms crossed and no notepad in sight, quickly reminded me that Light, Wholeness and Liberation could not remain 'pie in the sky' stuff, but had to be brought down to earth, pragmatic and operational. I kicked into action with a 12-minute briefing on the landmine problem, handing Hanegbi a one-page map of contaminated areas. I then invited his leadership, as the influential Chair of the Knesset's powerful Defense and Foreign Affairs Committee. Hanegbi didn't just accept the challenge, he *rose* to it, as they say. "I will do this," he promised, with conviction in his steely blue eyes and with a departing handshake. We both knew this was easier said than done. We discussed nothing about his past politics or political future. This was about where he stood here and now on the issue of liberating land and lives.

Understanding the root causes of systemic problems is needed to identify strategic pathways, in order to replace destructive patterns with constructive alternatives that will ensure lasting change in thought and behavior.

Discernment is about more than diagnosing the symptoms of a problem. True understanding benefits from critical diagnostic thinking, but is most valuable when it takes the shape of exploration of underlying systems and patterns. To tackle intractable problems, leaders need to assess the root causes and mull over the strategic leverage points that might bring the most promising shifts in societal behavior. Liberating leadership requires a wide-eyed exploration of alternatives. This space is more about *seeing* than looking. Technical fixes don't work and armchair punditry is insufficient. To understand the complexity of a matter requires the patience to 'hurry slowly,' allowing time for 360-degree analysis, while including engagement with all stakeholders affected by a particular issue.

It's never a simple matter of persuasion and debate or winning people over. The pursuit of transformation presents complexity, contradiction and divergence—super-tough choices, in other words. Leaders must anticipate the consequences of their own



Jerry White in Angkor Wat with band of Cambodian mine victims

daily choices that might send signals that either help or hinder liberation. The temptation is always for the best and brightest in a room to shut down discussion with their solutions, posed as practical next steps and 'early wins'—*anything* to bring the exploration phase to a close. This is exactly the temptation a wise leader of understanding will resist. The key is to open up the discussion in pursuit of more elevated strategies for collective action that will deliver long-lasting impact.

In our International Campaign to Ban Landmines, it was vital to avoid the trap of narrowing the terms of debate. This wasn't just a campaign to ban planting landmines, it also required mine clearance, no manufacture or stockpiling, and that states provide assistance to the victims of mines—both past and future. For *understanding* to be transformative, it requires rigorous attention to language, including vigilance to ensure that discussion does not devolve to the lowest common denominator or become hostage to one stakeholder's self-interest. Predictably, lawyers prefer legal lingo; CEOs prefer 'bottom-line' financials; and defense officials prefer military jargon. All love their acronyms, meant to keep outsiders at bay, so that insiders can control the terms of understanding.

When I first queried Israeli diplomats at UN arms control meetings in Geneva and New York about their take on landmines, there were the knee-jerk responses: "This is a security issue, and landmines are a cheap way to keep terrorists from crossing our borders." And, "We would love to live in an ideal world without mines, but our neighbors are so hostile that we can't make progress without regional peace." There was the odd deflection: "The United States hasn't signed the Mine Ban Treaty, so why would we?" or even outright denial and offense: "We don't have a mine problem in Israel—you are our landmine problem!"

These were predictable refrains. Landmine ban activists heard similar statements from other defense establishments, including the Pentagon and members of NATO. Fair to say that it is not their *modus operandi* to surrender weapons they've spent decades stockpiling. Reactionary thinking is rarely about wisdom or understanding. It simply represents the entrenched response of any bureaucracy not wanting to give up gadgets or tools that might come in handy one day. Without understanding, many mine ban campaigners took the issue personally and ascribed to the



Princess Diana with widow and mother of a Bosnian killed by a mine

military evil motive. Most of the civil society campaigners had no military experience and found it difficult to argue credibly within a security framework.

Another temptation was for each interested party to make it all about them. Deminers wanted money for demining; victim advocacy groups wanted money for prosthetics; lawyers wanted money to lobby for new legal frameworks from country to country. Such technical fixes, however seductive and pragmatic, risk short-circuiting the desired paradigm shift: the need to delegitimize landmines once and for all, ensuring an end to use, production, stockpiling and transfer of these indiscriminate weapons that can't tell the difference between the sandal of a child or the boot of a soldier.

To reframe the narrative of an issue requires critical analysis and strategic communication. One of the reasons Princess Diana was so crucial to our campaign was that she possessed a unique blend of global celebrity and authentic compassion. Princess Diana nearly single-handedly reframed the landmine issue in the public's mind as a *humanitarian* rather than a *security* issue. To this day, over 80 percent of mine victims are civilians, *not* soldiers. The humanitarian argument was about the thousands of civilian women, children and farmers killed and maimed each year. Even if mines had limited military utility, what was to be done about the enormous human cost? This was a fight *for* people rather than *against* the military.

To underscore the importance of human security, we organized landmine survivors worldwide to speak out, to share their undeniable stories of horror and pain. Survivors became the lifeblood of the mine ban movement. Their courageous testimonies highlighted the fact that the landmine campaign was never just about landmines, but it was about people and their right to personal safety and mobility.

One of the overreaching goals was to transform outdated military security frameworks into human security frameworks that would in fact increase citizen and public safety. Eradicating landmines in the 1990s would strengthen international norms against any and all indiscriminate weapons (our successful campaign to ban cluster munitions followed in 2008, building on the landmine success story). This system change would also help repair devastated



New sign in the Golan where Jerry White was injured. Warning!

rural economies, increase prospects for livelihood and promote peace. It was about reforming military-civilian engagement. The old military model was ineffective and dangerous. The new citizen model was modern and empowered to protect community interests.

We brought this human understanding and newfound wisdom to the Campaign for a Mine-Free Israel. We recognized how important it was to engage all diplomats and militaries and not to turn them into reactionary enemies of the cause. Our language had to engage around what each of us stands for—our common values—rather than what divides us. What was it we all could agree on? Well, surely none of us wanted our own children maimed or killed by mines. So, how might we work together to stop this madness?

If we had proceeded on a rabidly adversarial march, country to country with 'Ban Mines' posters, picket signs and strident chants, I can assure you that very little progress would have been made. Modern advocacy need not follow the competitive patterns of last century's Cold War, where one side wins at the other's expense. We believed that everyone would win by eradicating mines. Again, we are not talking about magic or luck. Impact requires that leaders of any liberation movement align their wisdom and understanding. This requires that you '*know thyself*'—how your message and behavior will come across to certain audiences in different cultures. This requires that you '*know thy audience*'—thinking hard about the people whose thought and behavior you want to influence.

One of the fundamental things I have learned about successful advocacy is so darn obvious that I'm embarrassed to write it here. It is this: you will run into human beings wherever you go—mothers, fathers, sons, daughters, brothers, sisters. No matter your chosen field or cause, getting anything accomplished means you will deal with people. Whether you're wearing a navy suit in Washington or Geneva, or a camouflaged jacket on the frontline, torn jeans at an all-day rally or sacred tunics at an interfaith service, *you are always and everywhere dealing with people*. These are individuals of all stripes and faiths, with values, concerns, hopes and anxieties, just like you and me. It's so simple and obvious that we change-makers too easily forget. We fall into a trap of *mis*-understanding, making 'the other' different than we. We inadvertently create adversaries, even among our friends and colleagues.



Daniel Yuval and Jerry White at US Congress

I remember with regret writing a sizzling ten-page memo to US Senator Patrick Leahy criticizing the USAID War Victims Fund and enumerating all the things they could do better. For nearly ten years that memo, filled with righteous footnotes, put significant distance between me and otherwise like-minded individuals trying to deliver quality artificial limbs and humanitarian assistance worldwide. As a close friend later told me, “Jerry, being right

doesn’t win you friends or get the job done.” That remark has stuck deep inside of me.

By the time I returned to Israel, where I had stepped on my mine, I was learning about different types of minefields in the world—political and social. It was humbling to realize that I was responsible for creating some of them.

Re-approaching Israel on this issue required me to know myself better and also to better understand my audience. Israel presented a particular challenge with a largely traumatized population that perceives itself under siege from all sides. Most Israelis believed landmines were critical to bolster border security and prevent terrorists from infiltrating. Most knew very little if anything about the extent of the contamination. Up to one million buried mines threatened the lives and livelihood of Israelis and Palestinians alike. There had been sporadic accidents, including my own and other civilians over the years—mostly non-Jews, non-Israelis or livestock, nothing shocking or painful enough to awaken the country to action. I was looking for a tipping point, something that would make clear to this battered country that the cost of mines was simply too high.

Unfortunately, I found it in eleven-year-old Daniel Yuval.

It was February 6, 2010 and Israel had just had its first snow of the year. Daniel and his four siblings had never actually made snowballs, let alone a snowman. They parked on the side of the road and raced into an open field. Then, *BANG!* There was a muffled explosion and everyone froze. Daniel had detonated a mine and his right foot was blown off. Shrapnel had sprayed his older sister’s face. Within the hour, news cameras were capturing a blood-stained father bravely carrying his children out of a useless unmarked minefield, while their mother watched in desperation.

Several months earlier a local Israeli Kibbutznik had confided to me that, “Israel will never take action to clean up this mess until one of our very own children—a little Jewish boy or girl—gets hurt or killed, God forbid.” I went to visit Daniel Yuval in the hospital, just to show him that recovery from a landmine was not that scary, that if I could do it he could do it, that type of thing. But, by the time I’d left, Daniel had told me that he wanted to make sure this didn’t happen to any one else. “What can we do, Jerry, to make sure no other kids get hurt like me?”

Daniel became the wise-beyond-years youth ambassador for the Mine-Free Israel Campaign, and instantly the landmine issue was re-framed. This boy became the focal point for our National Campaign, just as Princess Diana had done 12 years before for the International Campaign. One wonders if Israel would have found the political will to pass legislation one year later to clear the country of all non-operational minefields if it were not for Daniel’s innocent courage. Suddenly, this brave little boy was on the television in living rooms across the country, teaching Israelis about the true nature of a weapon that maims children.

Still, it was necessary but not sufficient to have Daniel’s wisdom and Israeli understanding in full bloom. Without *knowledge*, including expertise, resources and action, nothing would have happened to effect concrete change.

Knowledge and experience are needed to mobilize the information, people and resources to replace ignorance and inaction with expertise and measurable results.

In Israel, there was an astonishing ignorance amongst its population about the landmine problem. Families routinely drove by minefield signs and stretches of barbed wire for kilometers and had grown immune to their dangers.

The information was simply not available and the mythology that minefields enhanced Israeli security was entrenched. Even after stepping on a landmine, I myself didn’t know the extent of the contamination. We found a series of hiking maps in Israel first published in Hebrew in 2004 to alert tour guides and local hiking groups to the presence of landmines. One of the problems was that there were no maps in Arabic or English, or in Russian for that matter. Tourists, new immigrants and laborers were the most at risk of injury or death. So we set out to research and independently publish the first open-source map showing the minefields throughout the country and the West Bank.

Our small research team examined years of media reports, public statements and records from past casualties. Most Israelis were unaware, for instance, that hundreds of square kilometers of land are rendered unusable and dangerous due to landmine contamination. We were determined to put information out to the public, the media and policymakers, including bulleted one-page fact-sheets in multiple languages and accessible formats. Such a simple action made a big difference.



Jerry White visits eleven-year-old Daniel Yuval after amputation surgery

In 2010, we published the first comprehensive study of the problem in English, Arabic and Hebrew: *Explosive Litter: Status Report on Minefields in Israel and the Palestinian Authority*. Importantly, the research uncovered a trail of official correspondence, including the fact that the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) had publically declared that hundreds of their minefields were no longer operational, and the IDF did not object to their removal (1999 *State Comptroller Report*).

People are the most important source of knowledge beyond research. We, therefore, set out to develop a network of individuals who understood the issue or lived next to minefields. We built a small diverse group of landmine survivors, news reporters, rehabilitation specialists and public officials who were committed to change. First, we built trust by engaging all stakeholders and sharing information freely and transparently. Then, when the time came to launch a coalition to advocate publicly for a mine-free Israel, we were ready and willing. As with all dynamic campaigns, it was important to be *for* something and not just *against* some status quo. We knew what we were against: the insidious landmine, our sworn enemy that had stolen our limbs and lives. We were also against inaction, passivity and cynicism.

But what were we all standing *for*? We stood for the possibility of a mine-free Israel within ten years. We stood for the liberation of fertile land for farming. We stood for families living in safety, free of fear. We stood for the healing of people and the environment.

There are all sorts of things to do to build momentum for a successful campaign. Without research, analysis, media outreach, coalition building, advocacy and lobbying, there would have been no going forward, no matter how much wisdom and understanding we possessed.

But the vision for change goes beyond knowledge and understanding. Such vision can only come from sourcing your wisdom and that of others. Tapping into something bigger than all of us makes it possible to bring change that can benefit future generations of Israelis, Palestinians and Jordanians. Yes, even the world.

Liberation is never about the one obvious boulder blocking your way. Leading transformation is an internal, external and social



(left to right) Jerry White, Amit Yuval, Daniel Yuval and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announcing mine clearance legislation

phenomenon. As one wise friend reminds me, “Our outer work is only as deep and expansive as our inner work.”

Wisdom, Understanding and Knowledge form an undeniable platform for liberation.

We had understood the problem and had built a knowledgeable team to move our mission forward. Now it was time to call forth wisdom—in the politicians, military and citizens of Israel.

On February 7, 2011, Daniel and his older sister Amit and younger brother Yoav (who were also hurt in the Golan minefield) joined me and our campaign coordinator Dhyana Or in Jerusalem to meet virtually all Knesset Members and head of factions. We hired the savvy Tel Aviv government relations firm, Policy, to arrange meetings with anyone inside government who would agree to see us. This ended up including the Prime Minister, the Minister of Defense, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Head of the Opposition. Careful to avoid anger and castigation, we urged them to fulfill the promises they had made to young Daniel and our campaign in the previous year, and called on them to stand with us and vote in favor of the proposed mine clearance bill. That day, the bill passed its first reading by an unheard of unanimous vote across all party lines (60-0). Remarkably, Daniel was summoned to the front of the plenary room, normally reserved only for Members of Knesset. The following week, the bill was returned to the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee for hearings to resolve a number of outstanding issues (including securing over ten million dollars annually to support demining).

After negotiating final language that would mandate compliance with International UN Mine Action Standards and a pilot project to be initiated within months of passage, the proposed legislation was brought back to the full Knesset for a final historic vote on March 14, 2011. As Daniel and I sat with our fellow survivors and campaigners in the honorary balcony, senior Knesset Member Ronnie Bar-On (former Minister of Finance) publicly credited us for this historic moment before presenting the bill for the second and third final readings. Once again, the vote was unanimous, and we all but burst into tears of joy, light, wholeness and liberation. Israel had unanimously agreed to clear its non-operational minefields. This was a sweet victory for everyone who cared for land and lives held hostage for decades by minefields.

Many Israelis and internationals were astounded by the impact and speed of our unlikely Campaign. Nothing like this had happened since the successful “Don’t Pick the Wildflowers” campaign run by the Society for the Protection of Nature back in the 1950s. Our campaign had even pushed the boundaries of military-civilian collaboration on a border security issue, just as the ‘Arab Spring’ was signaling regional unrest.

How did the Mine-Free Israel Campaign catalyze this historic paradigm shift? Why did this Campaign succeed where others (including my earlier effort) had failed?

Upon reflection, I see now how the early casting of leadership matters. From the start, it is essential to recruit individuals with unconventional courage, wisdom and integrity, whether as young as eleven-year-old Daniel, or the Campaign Coordinator Dhyana Or in his mid-thirties, right up to retired generals and politicians in their seventies. You don’t always get it right (with everyone revving on three cylinders simultaneously at all times), but on balance, you have to get *most* of it right, with leaders complementing each other’s inherent strengths. One must build a harmonized coherence among campaigners who ‘get it’ from the top down and the bottom up.

As we conclude, it is worth noting the four fundamental qualifications I now look for in leaders of liberation:

- *Are you a *doer*—a person of action? You don’t just talk or complain.
- *Do you *burn for justice* and humanity? You long for a more humane world.
- *Do you value *inner space*? You are not afraid of silence or spiritual practice.
- *Do you retain *hope* and optimism? You are not cynical about the future.

Cynicism is the number one killer of hope and progress, and sadly we see it creeping worldwide, as if we are all going to ‘hell in a hand basket’ without our having any say in the matter. Such an attitude manifests victimhood, a mentality that is self-pitying and focused on the past rather than on what’s possible. Without hope and vision, even hard-working teams will die.

Transformation will only be born with hopeful liberating leaders who learn to align their wisdom, their understanding and their knowledge. The Mine-Free Israel Campaign aligned all three: Who We Are (*Wisdom*), How We Think (*Understanding*), and What We Do (*Knowledge*). There will always be people who are afraid, like many Israelis who initially clung to the false security of landmines. The Campaign kept holding up a mirror for Israelis to look for the true face of security and progress, not the illusion found in outdated minefields. In the end, only Israel could rediscover its ancient wisdom to address this modern-day plague.

Success for the Mine-Free Israel Campaign was the result of individual citizen-leaders tapping the power of their inner wisdom, and actively sharing understanding and knowledge to effect lasting change in the Middle East. We started with the raw power of raising the voices of the people most affected by the issue—the survivors themselves. We also recruited a local coalition coordinator, Dhyana Or, an Israeli who understood the interdependent components of our strategy and could implement them with the support of dedicated partners such as Policy, ACRI, Bizchut, Quadro and Roots of Peace. Liberation movements such as the Mine-Free Israel Campaign require the casting of leaders with integrity—who know how to integrate and align their knowledge, understanding and wisdom. Catalytic leaders such as Dhyana Or, the Yuval Family, Israeli columnist Nahum Barnea and our legal and political advisors, Tirza Leibowitz and Ambassador Lincoln Bloomfield, Jr., comprise a winning team of integrity that does not have to be large in size, just huge in quality, credibility and courage.

Liberating leadership requires wisdom to transform contentious issues into unifying opportunities. This

is done by activating leaders who are able to transcend their personal identity and social profiles to serve humanity with an eye to the well-being of future generations.

Having worked with leaders from all walks of life and from over 100 countries, I have come to appreciate the special type of wise leadership needed for the global challenges ahead. There are a growing number of people who are learning how to summon the courage to take on some of society’s most rigidly embedded institutions in pursuit of life-saving, economy-enhancing change. We invite all leaders to embrace this liberation philosophy for change—aligning their wisdom, understanding and knowledge to challenge the established order, provoking deeper conversation and participation. This means engaging constructively with the military, religious denominations, multinational corporations, even what has been dubbed ‘the nonprofit industrial complex.’ Each of these groups has a critical role to play in maintaining societal cohesion. In the end, each piece, each person needs to be balanced by the other, contained in a whole of wisdom applied for the common good.

It will certainly take more than mere technology and military expertise to clean up the many minefields we have created across the planet. We must and will call forth a new generation of wise liberators.

Jerry White is a recognized leader in the Nobel Peace Prize-winning International Campaign to Ban Landmines. A global humanitarian and Ashoka Fellow, White is the author of Getting Up When Life Knocks You Down. At time of writing, White served as Executive Co-Chair of Abraham’s Path Initiative. In March 2012, he became US Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Conflict Stabilization Operations in Washington, DC.