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### Windows

"We need windows to the outside world – windows to let our story out, to let in the light. We need you to be our windows. Will you be a window? Will *you*? And you, and you?"

The finger that points at me, the eyes that meet mine, the voice that locks itself into my consciousness, is that of "Amal," one of several Palestinian women whom I have met thus far. I am in the West Bank as part of a delegation jointly sponsored by Christian Peacemaker Teams and the Reformed Church in America. We have come to learn, to protest in non-violent ways, to stand in solidarity with Palestinians and Israelis who are working for peace in this divided and war-torn land.

Amal is an articulate representative of all the Palestinian women who have opened their hearts, their homes, their stories to us. She lives in Deheisheh, one of several United Nations refugee camps for the 30 to 40 thousand Palestinians who have been forced out of their villages by government order but who refuse to leave their home country – the "internally displaced." Located within Bethlehem, Deheisheh is a maze of narrow, tangled streets and alleyways. It is a community of contrasts. Drab cement-block walls serve as canvas for painted murals, some depicting ancestral villages that exist only in the memory of the camp's oldest residents. A kindergarten playground is surrounded with razor-wire. Here and there, a fig tree grows next to a fence covered with photos of young men who have "disappeared."

The lined faces of women like Amal tell stories of suffering. Theirs are stories of walls, roadblocks and checkpoints; of physical and verbal abuse; of homes vandalized, stolen or bulldozed; of olives groves cut down, wells poisoned, services denied. They are stories of arbitrary laws, arrest and imprisonment of children as young as 14. "Is it any wonder," Amal wonders, "that Palestinian women have become light sleepers?"

The reasons for and history of the present conflict are complex and far-reaching, but it is clear to all of us who have been meeting and living with Palestinians this past week that those who have called this region home for centuries want to exist in justice and peace with their neighbors – Jews, Muslims and Christians alike.

Will you be a window? Amal looks at me. Will you tell our story? I am still pondering her question, already aware that I have raised the sash.

--Marilyn Paarlberg