



A Message From Our President

This has been a challenging year for us all! With Covid-19, we've had to postpone our Tree of Life journeys and suspend our usual conferences and programs, and yet the roots of Tree of Life are strong and resilient. Sustained by the support of all our volunteers and contributors, we've been able to maintain and even strengthen our solidarity with our friends in Palestine.

However challenging the pandemic has been for us, it pales in comparison to what our friends in the West Bank and Gaza have experienced. They have struggled with the failure of Israel and the international community to provide vaccines and medical supplies for our Palestinian friends. This plus yet another massacre in Gaza and a tourist economy devastated by closures has left our friends struggling for survival.

In response, I'm so grateful for your generous support! You've supported the work of Middle East Children's Alliance in their emergency work in Gaza. Through your donations and purchases, you've expanded our sales of olive oil so we can make our educational scholarships available for more Palestinian students. You've written letters and attended meetings with Senators and Congressional representatives to urge them to stop funding Israel's violation of human rights and international law. You have written letters and made phone calls in support of H.R. 2590. You together with thousands of others, led primarily by informed and passionate youth, have taken part in numerous rallies, vigils and demonstrations, and in a program, entitled, "From Ferguson to Palestine", you have attended a concert offered by magnificent Palestinian musicians that helped us to see the powerful role the arts can play in the struggle for a better future.

As the mother of 5 children, I know how challenging this year has been. Trying to keep them safe and provide for their education and spiritual well-being has humbled me as I think about Palestinian children and their struggle for survival.

As I write this, we have learned about how a child, Muhammed Tamimi was shot and killed by an IDF soldier in the village of Nabi Saleh, a village we have visited in our Tree of Life journeys. The Tamimi family has warmly welcomed us into their home and shared their heroic struggle for a better future for their children. No matter how challenging my life can sometimes be, meeting with such families reminds me of our sacred responsibility to provide a Tree of Life for all God's children. Thank you for joining me in this work! Please read this newsletter and see how you can help.



Ghoufran and her daughter Sena standing with Ahd Tamimi outside the Tamimi home in Nabi Saleh.

- **Contribute to Tree of Life Educational Fund** through a multi-year pledge, recurring donation, or a one-time donation. You may designate your contribution for a specific purpose, such as scholarship stipends for young travelers so they can return home ready to become activists for justice or academic scholarships for Palestinian students in Gaza and the West Bank.
- **Buy our Palestinian olive oil**
- **Donate to help us plant a tree at Tent of Nations** in honor of someone you love.
- **Urge your elected officials to support H.R. 2590.**

(Continued on back cover)

Congress Fails to Hear Babies' Cries

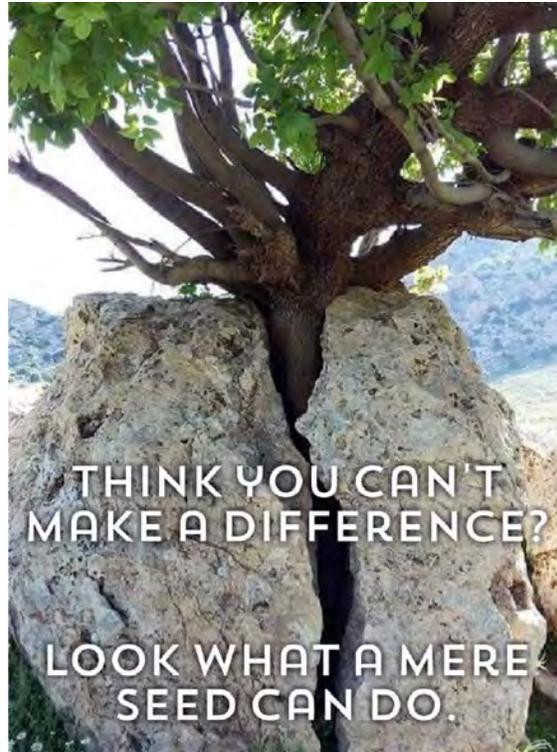
A Rabbinic scholar noted: If someone studying Torah fails to respond to a baby's cry, there is something wrong with his learning. Congressional failure to hear the persistent cries of Palestinian babies likewise demonstrates dysfunctional learning.

Human Rights Watch released a report declaring that the Israeli government is committing the crime of apartheid. HRW's exposition follows a similar report from the Israeli human rights organization B'Tselem.

For years, Israeli leaders have warned that Israel's policies will result in apartheid. Journalist Hassan Mehdi noted in *The Intercept* Hirsh Goodman's Memoir account of David Ben Gurion's apartheid warning immediately following the Six-Day War in June 1967. "Israel, he said, better rid itself of the territories and their Arab population as soon as possible. If it did not, Israel would soon become an apartheid state."

Yitzhak Rabin, during the first of his two terms as Israel's prime minister, told a T.V. journalist in 1976, "I don't think it's possible to contain over the long term if we don't want to get to apartheid, a million and a half [more] Arabs inside a Jewish state." Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert predicted that "if the two-state solution collapses, and we face a South African-style struggle for equal voting rights, then the State of Israel is finished." Likewise, former Israeli Ehud Barak declared that "if this bloc of millions of Palestinians cannot vote, that will be an apartheid state."

Yet, in the face of Israel's maturing apartheid, unconditional support for Israel remains the policy of Congress and the Biden Administration. This failed policy includes \$3.8 billion per year in military aid, the approval of \$735 million munitions sale during Israel's recent assault on Gaza that killed 248 Palestinians, including 66 children, and 44 vetoes of U.N. Resolutions critical of Israel since 1972. The definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different result. The "special relationship with Israel" must end. It has only served to embolden Israel's right-wing settler movement. It has not brought peace, freedom, justice, and equality to the people between the river and the sea.



Rep. Betty McCollum's bill, H.R. 2590, The Palestine Children and Families Act, would prohibit U.S. tax-payer dollars from being used to arrest and detain Palestinian children, the demolition of Palestinian homes, and the further annexation of Palestinian land. Such human rights legislation is but a minimal but essential response to Palestinians' cries for freedom.

At present, 29 Congresspersons have joined in cosponsoring H.R. 2590 – but none from Connecticut. Seventy-four Connecticut faith-based, labor union, civil rights and community organizations have signed a Resolution calling on our Connecticut Congressional Representatives (Larson, Courtney, DeLauro, Himes and Hayes) to co-sponsor H.R. 2590. Connect with your congressperson through the Congressional switchboard 202-224-3121. Tell your congressperson to hear the cries of babies and act consistently with human rights – not apartheid. Tell him/her to cosponsor H.R. 2590.



John Fussell
Advocacy Coordinator
and Vice President
Tree of Life Educational Fund

"If I were told the world would come to an end tomorrow, I would plant a little olive tree today!"

– A paraphrase on words from Martin Luther

In May of this year, Tent of Nations, south of Bethlehem, suffered a devastating fire in which hundreds of their olive trees were destroyed. While the cause of the fire is uncertain, for years Israel has tried to remove the family of Daoud Nassar from their land in order to further expand nearby settlements. And yet, showing remarkable Sumud (Arabic for steadfast determination and resilience),

Tent of Nations has resolved to continue being a place true to the words found on a large rock at the entrance to their farm, "We Refuse to Be Enemies".

To support them in their mission, we invite you to consider providing funds for the replanting of their olive trees. For a gift of \$25, an olive tree will be planted in memory or in honor of someone of your choice. Please send your gift payable to Tree of Life Educational Fund along with the name of the one you wish to honor. You may also donate on our website. These names will be listed on our website and also presented to our friends at Tent of Nations.



Daoud Nassar at the entrance to his farm.



Diane, Elaine and Jack Brouillard with the 2011 TOLEF Journey planting olive trees at Tent of Nations.



Olive Oil for Education!

Since ancient times, Palestinians have used olive oil not only for culinary purposes but also as fuel for their clay lamps.

We thank all those who purchase our Palestinian olive oil, and this year, we especially give thanks for our friends with Jewish Voice for Peace – Boston who have set a new record for their purchases – over 21 cases of olive oil!

That's a lot of light!



Susan Etscovitz, JVP– Boston, delivering Palestinian olive oil

This year, for your holiday gifts, please consider giving olive oil to your family and friends. Tree of Life's "Education in a Bottle" program provides over \$19,000 in scholarships per year for students in the West Bank and Gaza. In addition to Susan's "depot" in greater Boston, if you would like to purchase olive oil and are near Cape Cod, you may contact Elaine Brouillard, elaine@tolef.org. If you are in Connecticut, please contact David Good, davidwgood@fccol.org or Ghoufran Allababidi, ghoufran@tolef.org. Olive oil is available in 750 ml bottles and 1 or 3 liter tins.

*"For there is always light,
If only we're brave enough to see it
If only we're brave enough to be it."
– Amanda Gorman*

Neverland

By Mariam Azeez | June 2, 2021

Where is your Neverland?

Is it the shores that are held together by the sand?
Or perhaps the foggy forests where tall trees stand,
On their own soil.

Or is it in someone else's home?

Greedy thoughts roam,

"If I don't steal it, someone else will."

Maybe, your Neverland is in the falling drops of rain,
but today, They're bodies.

Today,

Missiles are raining pain,

Cities are torn,

Babies are mourned,

...is your Neverland somewhere with a breeze?
Because tonight, families weep in the heat,

Of bombs.

This tale is a century old,

And these people have long been sold,

So you think, maybe those kids hopes that still stand,

Are as everlasting as the sun,

But deep down the truth is they can only hope,

For there is nowhere left to run,

Not while they carry the bodies of their dead daughters
and sons.

Neverland is an open-air prison.

Neverland is a land,

Where children don't survive any longer than the amount
of fingers they carry on both of their hands,

What does it really mean to never be able to grow up?

Because today a child is crying, "You can't run. You can't
do anything, you give up."

Where is YOUR Neverland?

"Do not say I am only a youth!"

— The prophet Jeremiah

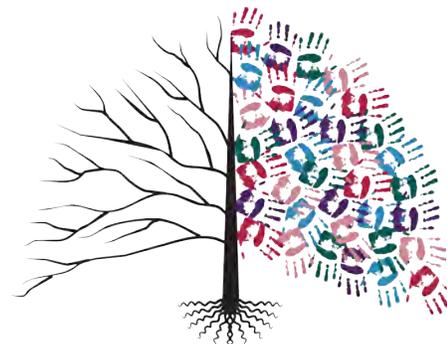
In response to Israel's most recent attack on Gaza, we are very grateful for the moral leadership our young friends from Tree of Life and American Muslims for Palestine have exemplified. They took the lead in a number of non-violent demonstrations and vigils throughout our area. The photograph below shows young people taking the lead for a vigil in Waterbury in which a young Palestinian American, Mariam Azeez offered her poignant and powerful poem, "Neverland."



Above: Students leading a vigil in Waterbury, May 2021



Left: Mariam Azeez



Heal the Tree of Life
Coeurist

Tree Of Life Journey 2022

March 8-19 Optional Extension to Turkey – March 19-24

TEACH YOUR CHILDREN WELL



In their song, Crosby, Stills and Nash offer important words for all children in the human family:

*You, who are on the road
Must have a code that you can live by
And so become yourself...
Teach your children well.*

It is with sadness and frustration that we have been forced to cancel and reschedule our Tree of Life journey multiple times in the past year and a half. We are optimistic that we will be able to travel in March 2022.

This journey will have a special focus on education. What is the “code” being taught to the children of Israel and Palestine?

As our own country struggles with the ongoing issues of systemic racism, the lack of civility in the public square, disregard for the truth, scorn of modern medicine during the pandemic, all culminating in the horrendous violence seen at our nation’s capital on January 6th, how do parents, faith communities and schools raise up a new generation of children, free of violence, ignorance, and fear? Most faith communities – sadly not all – put a high priority on instilling a moral compass in their children –

a “code to live by” – so they can become the children of God they were created to be.

Native Americans wisely speak of “7 directions”. Teaching children about the points of the compass – North, South, East and West – is an important part of their geographical education. Likewise, teaching them about geology, the earth beneath their feet is important for their intellectual development. So also, with the 6th direction. We want children to look up at the stars and wonder about the immensity of the universe. But how do we teach children to honor the “seventh direction?” As we travel together, we will meet extraordinary voices of conscience – Palestinian and Israeli, Jewish, Muslim and Christian – who despite peer pressure, oppression and the cruelty and decadence of occupation/colonization exemplify what it means to honor that 7th direction. Their dignity and courage are what we yearn for all children in the human family. Here in our country as we struggle with how to create curricula that teaches what it means to be engaged in “antiracism”, in this journey we will have the opportunity to meet extraordinary two-legged curricula, those who could teach us all how to become more nearly ourselves and how to create “a more perfect union.”

(Continued on back cover)

Photographs above thanks to Susan Aboeid, traveler on the Tree of Life 2017 Journey.

Message From our President (continued from pg. 1)

As the Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish said:

"We have on this earth what makes life worth living: the aroma of bread at dawn, the beginning of love, grass on a stone, mothers living on a flute's sigh and the invaders' fear of memories."

I'm proud of the work we do in Tree of Life Educational Fund! We keep alive the memories of those who have lost so much. We refuse to forget, but also we work together to create a better future for all God's children.



Ghoufran Allababidi
President, Tree of Life Educational Fund

Tree Of Life Journey 2022 (continued from pg. 5)

At the Presidential inauguration, we heard from a young 22-year-old poet, Amanda Gorman who personifies the spirit and the wisdom we would hope for all children.

*Somehow we've weathered and witnessed
A nation that isn't broken
But simply unfinished...*

*We will not be turned around
Or interrupted by intimidation...
With every breath from my bronze-pounded chest,
We will raise this wounded world into a wondrous one.*

from "The Hill We Climb" by Amanda Gorman

May that be the clarion call of this Tree of Life Journey! We would love to have you travel with us! Please let us know if you are interested in more information. www.tolef.org

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Amplifying voices of conscience for social justice

Mission

The Tree of Life Educational Fund, a 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation, was established by The First Congregational Church of Old Lyme to provide cross-cultural and transnational travel experiences, interfaith conferences, and educational opportunities to help participants become more enlightened and engaged in making this a more just and peaceful world.

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