

## Some Lessons Gleaned from Living in Palestine

How strangely I'm ending my time in Palestine. Having lived three years in Hebron, Palestine, I find that I'm surprised but finally keenly aware of what it really means to be a CITIZEN of the United States. At the same time I've come to appreciate more clearly what it means for me to be CHRISTIAN in our world today.

I've always taken my responsibility as a voter seriously. I've usually done a fair amount of study on the issues before elections. Now, however, after some international experience first in Nicaragua and now in Israel/Palestine, I feel the real need to tap into alternative news sources to discover truth. I've seen firsthand in Palestine how U.S. policies drive the politics of other countries for good and for bad. I've seen especially how the negative effects of U.S. congressional decisions barrel down on people who have no voice in the matter. If U.S. citizens hear anything at all about their country's political maneuverings through regular news sources, the rhetoric insists that U.S. security must keep our democracy and economy strong and safe.

In terms of my faith too, I've prayed fervently here in Palestine to follow the Spirit's lead, to step into situations, the necessity to be present to these brothers and sisters who haven't led a normalized life for their \*63 years of Occupation\*. It's naturally very difficult for each of us Americans to intentionally remove the ear and heart plugs and to trust that following Jesus is worth all the risk it might involve. Living among faith-filled Muslims, it amazes me now that their lively faith has turned me more toward my own faith - the way of Jesus.

Now I know without a doubt that to live non-violently as a Christian, I must truly love my enemies in deed, not just in words. I must, for one, reject militarism. I know, too, that to live non-violently, I must live in greater simplicity considering how any decisions of mine might affect especially people who are poor without choices. I learned this lesson very concretely when two young Norwegian men volunteering with an international peace organization worked with me under the blazing sun in a barley field near Hebron. They recounted how they never travel by plane. They usually hitchhike or go by boat even if it is inconvenient. They eat foods which are not on the boycott list toward Israel. They watch carefully so every dollar they spend contributes only to life-giving enterprises. These young adults modelled how thoughtful spending makes a difference, how it makes a small dent in consumerism, one of the rampant diseases of our day. They emphasized our connection to every living and nonliving bit of matter in the universe.

Decision by decision, one by one, the home, the neighborhood, the town, the nation changes.

As I return to the U.S. I am asking more serious questions than ever. Questions like: If Christians of the past resisted injustice and went to jail and prison freely in order to be faithful, why is this choice made so rarely by Christians today? Also, why is it that we — 6% of the world -- have so much food and money, while millions of other people have so little? Can we as Christians live contentedly, peacefully with such realities existing in our world without reaching out in some way wherever we are? How can ordinary citizens like you and me, take to heart more deeply our responsibility in forming a "government that we're proud of?", our town, our country, our world? Our world pleads that each of us works together for justice and peace. Then there is greater hope for all.