

GREEN WINDOW - Putting a Face onto Global Suffering

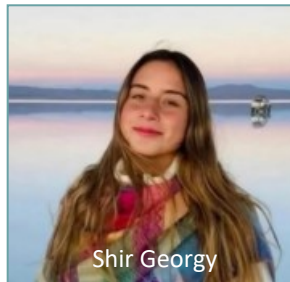
Janet Speth, CSJ, on behalf of the Federation Ecology Committee



We are all despairing of the news we are witnessing of the Hamas- Israeli conflict and we know it is the tip of the iceberg of the suffering the world over. One response is to protect ourselves, to minimize our feelings of helplessness with an attitude of detachment - it is happening over there, it does not affect me. Yet Pope Francis reminds us that, "Our goal ...is to become painfully aware, to dare to turn what is happening to the world into our own personal suffering and thus to discover what each of us can do about it. (LS #19)

How do we put a face onto suffering?

I found myself following the experience of one Canadian – a 22-year-old Israeli woman from the music festival massacre Oct. 7, 2023.



Shir Georgy at first was missing and then the announcement came that she had been murdered. I felt so devastated for her and her family. I can only image the terror she and the other young people must have felt. Such a loss of a beautiful and promising life.

What is rarely reported, and often never, is the devastation to the environment in these war-torn areas around the globe - the loss of biodiversity of life on the land, in the air and in the waters.

How do we personalize this suffering and allow ourselves to grieve for our planet home?



Oldest Olive Tree

Let us consider the oldest olive tree in the world, the Mother Tree, that grows in Palestine, in the small village of Al-Walajeh. She is estimated to possibly be 5,000 years old She rises 13 meters into the sky. She has a girth of 25 meters and her shade spreads over 250 square meters, enough to accommodate a crowd of several hundred people. From her root system she supports 22 other smaller trunks.

Throughout her history, she has witnessed the glory

and the anguish of countless invasions. The question is will she survive the traumas of these current years of political turmoil? Already her yield has significantly reduced from her former annual half ton of olive oil to at times now only 250 kilograms of oil and sometimes none.

How can we lament with her?

There are very simple and yet profound ways we can personalize Mother Earth and her suffering in these times. As we turn on the water for our morning coffee *or* for brushing our teeth let us think of the Mother Tree for whom water is so important and is being sorely impacted by the conflicts. Let us remember, for a moment, all the other-than-human life dependent on clean water in so many other war-torn areas around the globe.

Let us pray: May we always be grateful to Sister Water for her many blessings!

As we make our olive oil and vinegar salad dressing, let us bring to mind the wanton destruction of olive trees by the thousands in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict destroying all the life forms, that are dependent on them. Perhaps, we can purchase Zartoun, the fair-trade olive oil from Palestine and allow it to connect us with the land that Mother Tree has protected for eons of time. Let our hearts be broken as we acknowledge that the web of life is being torn asunder.

We pray: May our hearts be mended with hope for peace!

And as we nurture our own garden and house plants let us remember with gratitude Salah Abu Ali who daily cares for the Mother Tree lovingly watering her and protecting her. Let us bring to mind all those



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who care for and advocate for the sustainability of all life.

We pray: May they be strengthened and energized in their commitment to justice!

As we pray for both Shir's family and for the survival of Mother Tree let us ponder the words of Pope Francis, "I call on all believers to take only one side in this *[and any]* conflict — that of peace, not with words but with prayer." ¹ Let us believe that, "Truly much can be done" (LS # 180).

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<https://www.voanews.com/a/pope-francis-calls-for-end-to-israel-palestinian-violence/7316162.html>