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sentenced to life in prison by a military court. After the sentence was handed down, her home was bulldozed. She and her two daughters are left with only the makeshift shed that housed their animals. The woman begins to wail: "Why do Americans hate us? What have we done to you? We've lost everything! We are just struggling to survive. ..." We stand in shock as she continues to give voice to her anger and her grief.

Then, quite unexpectedly, she takes out a handkerchief, wipes her eyes, and invites us inside her shed for tea. We sit with her on her dirt floor, drinking watered down, sweet tea, and begin to listen to one another. This was the participants first awareness that many Palestinians believed the United States was waging war on them.

The Compassionate Listening Project, founded in 1996, evolved from these early citizen delegations

YES!



Sitting in a Gaza camp, I can imagine the rage of a Palestinian refugee—a member of Hamas—who saw his father and other relatives killed in front of him when he was a young boy. He was arrested many times and tortured. I can feel the grief he carries from being arrested on the eve of the birth of his first child, the son he didn't hold for his first five years of life. I think of times that I've had thoughts of revenge for incidents trivial in comparison. I remember the times I've fallen short of forgiveness.

Compassionate listening can be deeply healing for those listening as well as for those who are heard. What we're doing is creating an environment conducive to peace-building through deep, empathic listening. It is no simple thing. We work to see through any masks of fear or hostility to the sacredness of each individual. At times, we listeners must dig deep within ourselves to move beyond our own judgments and opinions.

Although we are not always "successful" in our own eyes, Israelis and Palestinians on all sides feel and appreciate our intention, which seems to be the most important factor. When we listen with the intention of building empathy and understanding, we also quickly build trust, and possibilities emerge. We have been able to bring opposing sides together in one room to listen to each other because our intentions are trusted.

Irene Siegel, a Jewish American, sleeps in the home of a Palestinian family in Beit Jala as part of a human-shield campaign to deter Israeli shelling of Palestinian homes

"Magdaline, my Palestinian hostess, looked at me sideways and said softly, 'Are you Jewish?' And I nodded. She threw her arms around me and said, 'You know, I love you, Irene. I love you like a sister.' And I cried. And so did she. And then she talked to me until two in the morning about everything—her fears, her pain, her experiences—everything she had held inside for so long, surrounded as she is by a community who are all suffering the same pains."

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Below: "Fortunately in my daily routine I actually don't feel the

ambivalence that I've had in the

Our experience has demonstrated that people want to take risks for peace, and will take risks, if given an opportunity to really be heard.

Compassionate listening with Israelis and Palestinians this past decade has been a gift for those involved. We've witnessed the courage of the human spirit in times both hopeful and dark. We've been privileged to hear so many stories filled with beauty, wisdom, and tears. After years of listening it has become so clear to me: all are suffering, all are wounded, all want to live with security, justice and peace. All are worthy of our compassion.

The question remains, how do we break the cycles of violence? Perhaps listening is one of the keys I'm now holding the vision of a new, global listening movement. This is my hope. This is my prayer:

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